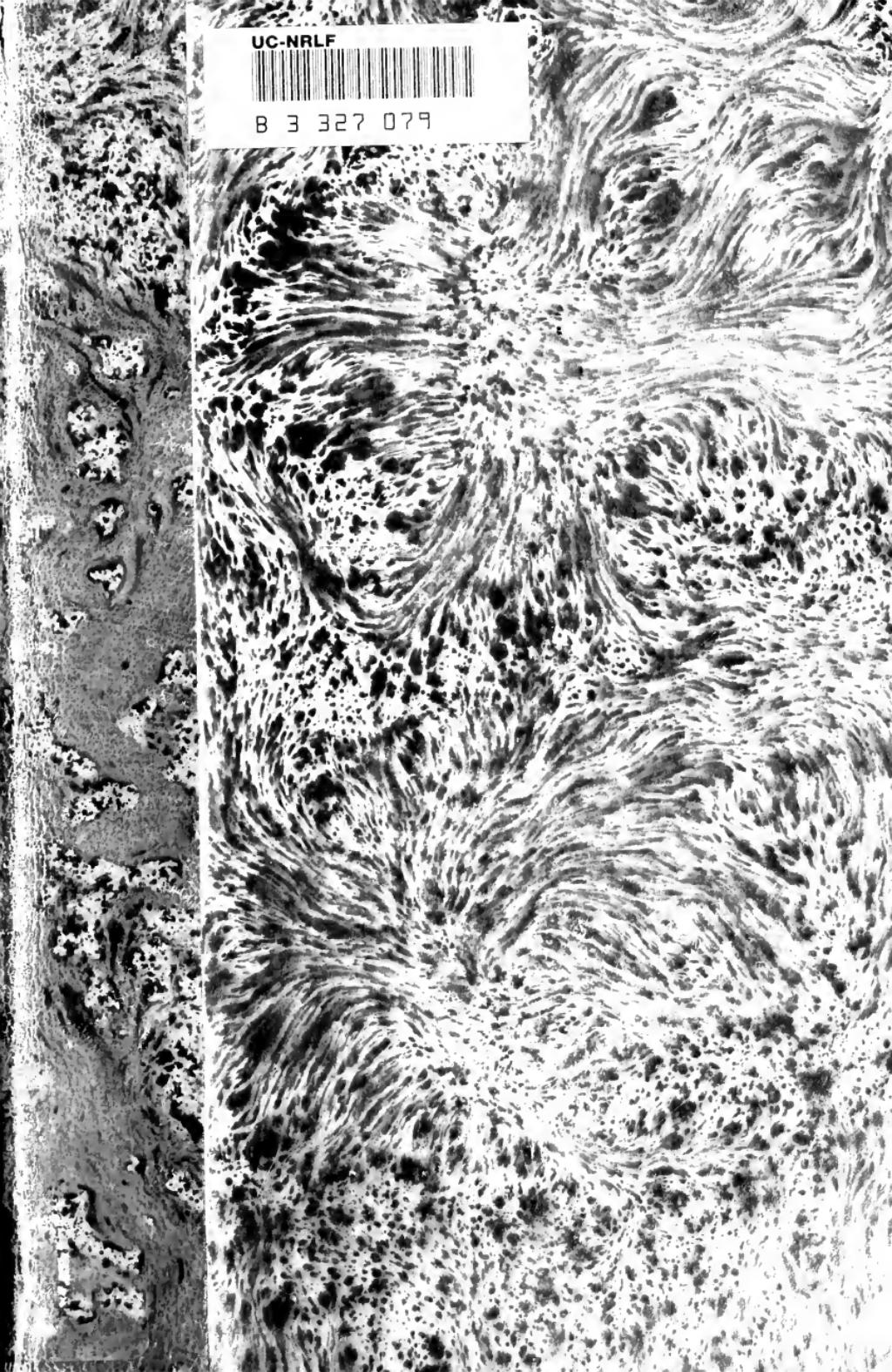
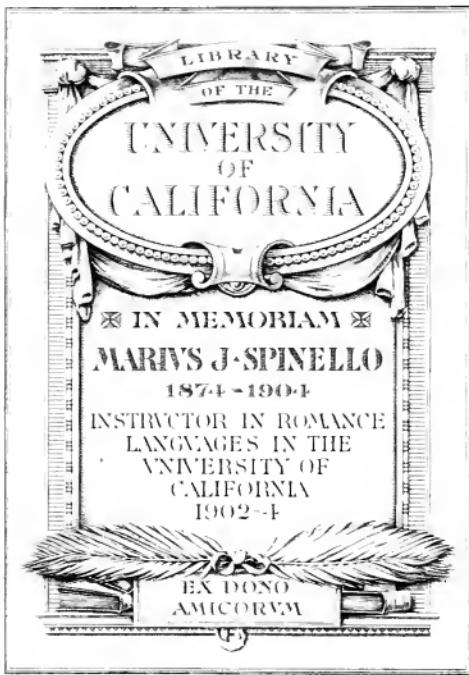


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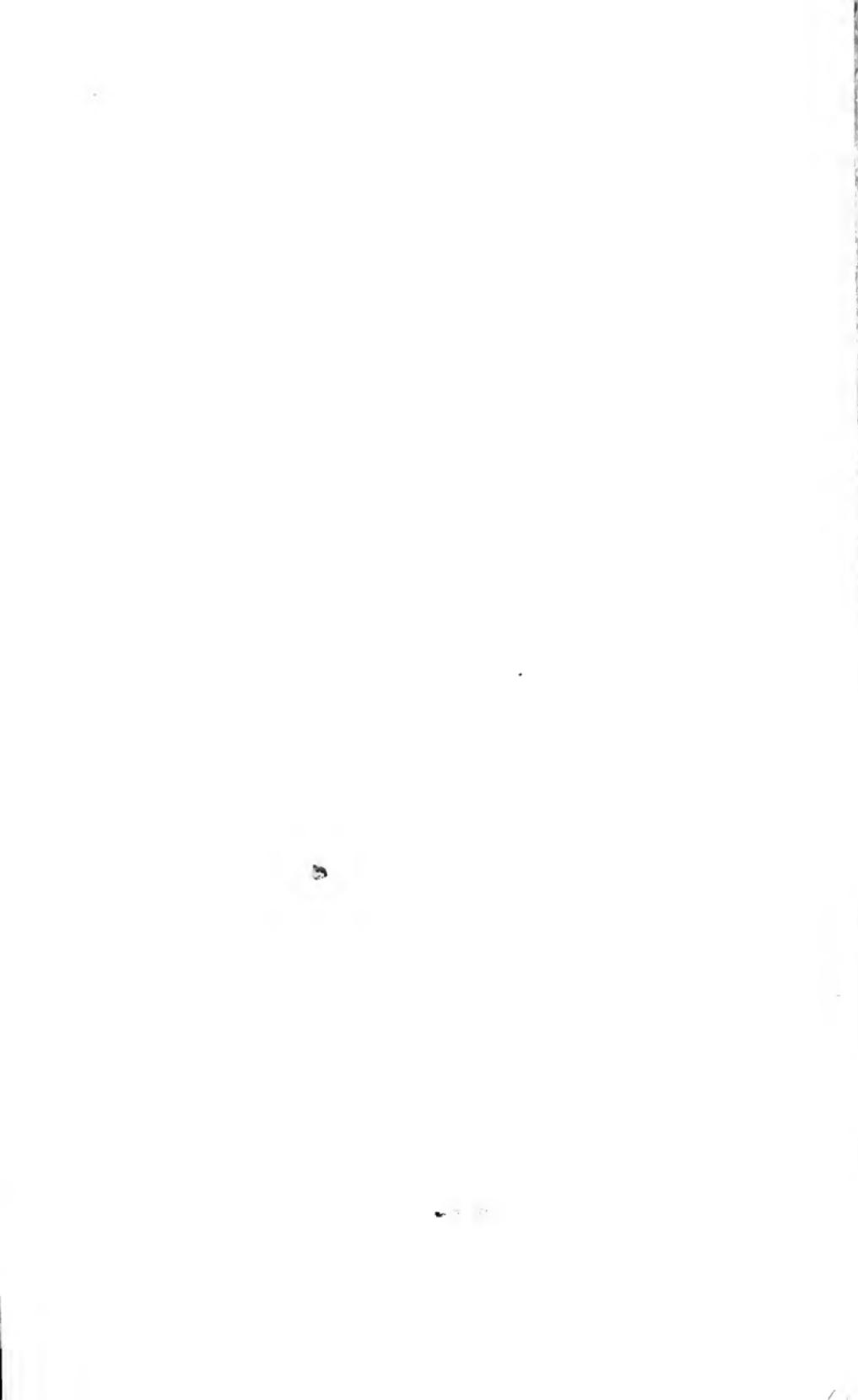


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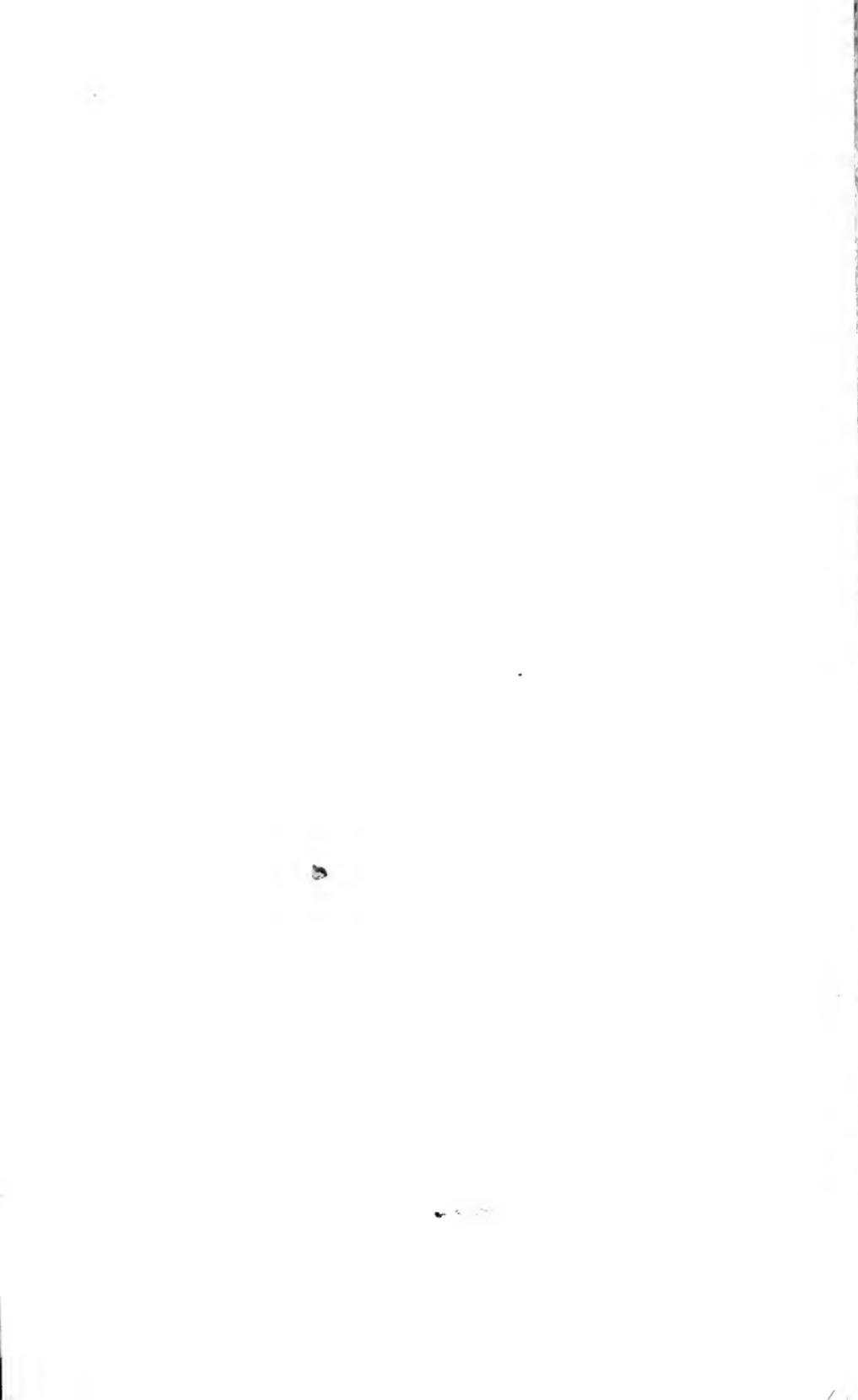












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CÆSAR BORGIA;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF WHITEFRIARS.

Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime?
Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle,
Now melt into sorrow, now madden to crime?

BYRON.



PARIS:
BAUDRY'S EUROPEAN LIBRARY,
3, QUAI MALAQUAIS, NEAR THE PONT DES ARTS.

1847.

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PREFACE DEDICATORY.

Forasmuch as in the course of this my present labour, which I have undertaken for the benefit of these times, or, if they should prove ungrateful, of posterity; considering the extraordinary and dangerous nature of the materials with which I wrought, (even as one who extracteth fine colours and dyes out of poisonous roots and minerals, or componeth brilliant devices in fire with explosive compounds,) I have felt myself more than ever exposed to the attacks of the NATURAL ENEMIES of all writers whom the world hath honoured with its commendations: and also remembering that certain Cliques have vowed my utter destruction in revenge for having demonstrated that the chief part of salvation is out of their little pales, the panic fear whereof all the generosity and favour of the Public, speaking through its mightiest organs, have not altogether dissipated!—considering these considerations, I say, the necessity of obtaining some protection for my work and myself did occur to me in a very ghastly manner, even as to a country lass who has parted with her sweetheart, and who perceiveth at a distance an awful TURNIP LANTERN, set by a jealous rival on a hedge, with sharp teeth, flaming eyes, and fearfully pale visage!

And even as she casteth about and debateth in her own mind, hesitating, on a stile, what to do, so did I: and thereupon the practice of the authors our predecessors of the two late centuries, came in my cogitations; who, visited by similar apprehensions, by soliciting the countenance and aid of some powerful friend, in a DEDICATION, unconsciously imitated the unlearned conclusion of the apple-cheeked wench when she turneth back a whole corn-field, and requesteth her lover to accompany her past the object, albeit acknowledging the unreal nature of the terrors diffused by the hollow esculent.

Moreover, it seemed to me that in labouring, by example, to restore the Art of Dedication to the esteem it once enjoyed, I should confer a great and substantial benefit on literature. An art, indeed, nearly lost, like that of illuminating upon glass, which it much resembles, the object of both being to substitute a gorgeous glare for the pure insipidity of truth or daylight; but whose advantages, at least to the artist, cannot be denied, and are therefore not to be despised by any modern professor of literature. For although the world hath abandoned some of its favourite traditions relating to the proper treatment of authors, and hath not of late publicly starved any one of the tribe,—yet until the nations do universally arrive at the conclusion that MIND is property as well as McD: that justice (to say nothing of gratitude) demands that those who supply the highest and noblest wants of humanity should be no worse treated than those who minister to its basest and most animal requirements; that no point of national policy or well-being is concerned in confiscating the property of a foreign author for the benefit of a native bookseller; and that it is a procedure as unjust, though not so palpable, as to seize a cargo of foreign corn for the use of the native baker, *gratis*, under pretext that it was not grown by the country into which, for that very reason, it is imported!—until, in brief, an Universal Copyright is conceded to all authors, by all civilized nations, railroad kings will continue to be the richest of men!—and until then the “smallest contribution” should be thankfully received by literature; and

as a dedication has always been considered a claim on the patron's generosity, to restore the custom is to confer a great literary benefit !

But so great is my alarm—which increaseth with every bold word I enforce myself to utter—that I dare not confide in the protection of one patron only; and therefore I have selected several, to whom I dedicate the following work under a form of division, which also, in a *modest* and *unpretending* manner, expresseth the contents.

To Ladies and Gentlewomen, and indeed to all honest and fair damsels who amuse their leisure hours with profitable perusals, is dedicated all that relates to Beauty's triumphs, distains, favours, and excellent caprices; to Lovers, the sweet and amorous parts are feelingly inscribed; to Soldiers, the martial achievements; to Scholars, the learning; to Historians, the romance; to Romancers, the history; to Poets, the verse; to Moralists, the catastrophe; to Critics, all that they find good; and to Posterity, the whole !

In recompence for the distinguished honour which I have thus conferred, all that I demand of the munificence of my patrons (with understanding that it is not to become a precedent) is—that they will believe me when upon my word and honour I assure them that I am myself and nobody else!—that all the conjectures and imputations which have confounded me with divers renowned personages do them the **GREATEST INJUSTICE!**—that I have never had my portrait put to any book, although I, too, might have taken warning by the doubtfulness of Shakspere's, and used the precaution so diligently observed by the immortal writers of this age, who have themselves carefully seen to the transmission of their features, tastefully idealized on canvas, to posterity!—and that whatever the liberality of foreign and domestic critics may have fathered upon me, I solemnly assure the whole human race that the only compositions of the kind with which I have contributed to its delectation are three in number; whereof the first is entitled “Whitefriars,” the second “Whitehall,” and the third what the puissant reader may readily discover by turning over this leaf, on which I subscribe myself,

His or her most obliged and terror-stricken

Servant and Client,

THE AUTHOR OF “WHITEFRIARS.”

CÆSAR BORGIA.

CHAPTER I.

ITALY IN THE YEAR 1500.

“Che le terre d’Italia tutte piene
Son di tiranni; ed un Marcel diventa
Ogni villan che parteggiando viene.”—DANTE.

For all the lands of Italy o’erflow
With tyrants; and each barbarous slave becomes,
Nursing our mad divisions, sovereign.

The great festival of the Christian world, the Jubilee of the year of Our Lord 1500, notwithstanding the distracted state of Italy, and the evil repute of the sovereign head of the church himself, attracted vast multitudes of pilgrims from all parts of Europe to Rome. Although firmly persuaded of the truth of the dark legends afloat concerning the cruelty, tyranny, and licentiousness of the supreme pontiff, Alexander VI., these pious wanderers were not deterred from seeking at his hands the indulgences and plenary absolutions offered to the faithful attending the jubilee in the city of St. Peter. The great dogma of the church that, however it may happen in matters temporal, in matters spiritual it is never deserted by its founder, had as yet sustained no shock in the universal opinion. It seemed as if the world, like Boccaccio’s Jew, was only the more convinced of the divine essence of a religion which could remain so unshaken by the viciousness of its professors. The fire kindled by Savonarola seemed to die out with that which consumed his own substance; or threw forth only a few bickering and scattered sparkles which were far from portending the great conflagration at hand. Remorse for guilt, the pangs of sorrow, the restlessness of suffering, the fears of superstition, the dreams of enthusiastic devotion, conducted thousands from all the regions of then Catholic Europe to the capital of Christianity. It is computed that no less than two hundred thousand pilgrims entered Rome on this grand festival—the last which the church celebrated in her unity.

The dignity of danger, perhaps, gave zest to the devotion of the warlike populations which sent each their quota to the spiritual rendezvous. At no period of her stormy existence had Italy been so convulsed and devastated by almost all the evils which can befall a nation,—by foreign invasion and domestic strife,—as at the period when we take up our chronicle.

In the South, the French, Spaniards, Turks, and Neapolitans, struggled

for the possession of Naples and Sicily, and deluged the beautiful lands in dispute with their blood. In the North, the French and Venetians ravaged Lombardy. Milan, in a series of revolutions, alternately lost and regained independence; numerous small states, among which were distinguished the polished dukedom of Ferrara, and the republics of Pisa, Lucca, and Sienna, with difficulty withstood subjugation to one or other of the mighty oppressors, their neighbours. In Tuscany, the Florentines, rent by furious factions, though protected by the French, were scarcely able to baffle the ambitious designs of the papal power, directed against them with the sagacity, perfidy, and merciless energy which distinguished the captain-general of the church, Cæsar Borgia, above all the politicians and commanders of the age.

This too famous leader was the natural son of Alexander VI., whom, to the scandal of the whole Christian world, he had raised to the highest honours which it was in his supremacy to bestow—honours which were far from satisfying the ambition of the recipient, to whom the princes of Italy ascribed the vast project of uniting its shattered sovereignties into an imperial crown for his own head. The great abilities which he had displayed in war, his unmatched subtlety, his courage, which seemed to defy both God and man, the unbounded ambition which he was known to cherish, justly rendered him the terror of Italy.

Nor was this magnificent project so visionary as modern historians have been inclined to consider it. The papal dominion in itself was one of the most extensive and powerful of all Italy, and was wielded by the intriguing and daring Alexander, a prince who, with all his vices, crimes, and inordinate lust of aggrandizement, possessed an extraordinary capacity. He was a Spaniard by birth, and to the sultry passions of his native land was believed to add all the refinements in dissimulation and treachery which centuries of slavery had taught the Italians. Age might probably have moderated the violence of his character, but the expiring volcano was continually stirred into action by the no less vehement, but more subtle genius of Cæsar Borgia, to whose vast plans his father's co-operation was essentially necessary.

Cæsar had been originally intended for the church, and during the lifetime of his elder brother, the Duke of Gaudia, whose tragical and mysterious fate excites so gloomy a curiosity, he had worn the mantle of a cardinal. But the moment that assassination, perhaps involving a still blacker crime, had removed this shadow of an elder brother from his path, he threw off the purple, and seemed determined never again to resume it, unless as a king. His valour in the field, and the alliance of the French, soon raised him to a high rank among the Italian generals. The Pontiff created him his generalissimo, and by conferring upon him the Dukedom of Romagna, seemed to open the way to him of sovereignty.

But the chief obstacles to the execution of the vast designs of Cæsar Borgia were the very instruments which he was compelled to use. The papal power, like all the other sovereignties of Europe at the period, was feudal in all its ramifications. During the wars of the emperors and popes, the Roman barons had managed to usurp to themselves even greater privileges and more complete independence than any other nobility. The great possessions of the church were held by them, with only a nominal submission, under the title of vicars. To break—to destroy the power of these nobles—became a great object of Cæsar's policy; to wrest back their usurpations was essential to the execution of his vaster plans. The

animosities and factions among the nobility themselves assisted his projects, and his own subtle genius furnished him with innumerable engines.

Ages of mutual rivalry and wrongs had exasperated against each other the two most powerful Roman families, the Orsini and the Colounas. With the impolitic aid of the former, the Borgias drove the latter into exile, and confiscated their immense possessions. Following up his successes, Cæsar, in two dreadful campaigns, distinguished by every species of barbarity, succeeded in destroying the power of nearly all the great families of Romagna. Meanwhile, Alexander crushed the rebellious spirit of the church by the exile, ruin, or death of a great many cardinals who opposed themselves to his tyranny, chiefly through resentment at the disappointment of the promises which he had made to secure his election.

While thus crushing their chiefs, Cæsar won, if not the affection, at least the goodwill of the common people, by substituting to the unbounded oppressions of their former masters a sway, which, however blood-thirsty and extortionate, was still a change for the better. The Roman nobility, like all that have been crushed, deserved their fate. The detail of their cruelties and oppressions form the blackest pages in the history of Italy. Dwelling in vast fortresses, with unnumbered dependents existing only on war and plunder, they committed every species of disorder with perfect impunity—robbed, murdered, ravaged, made war on one another, and laughed to scorn the powerless suzerainty of a priest, even while reverencing to adoration his spiritual character.

With the aid of the French, Cæsar successfully pushed on his great project; but the Orsini and other powerful barons at length perceived their mistake in aiding him, even to the ruin of their enemies. Symptoms of disaffection daily increased, and when Cæsar's allies, the French, sustained their great defeat in Lombardy, an open combination was entered into against him. The tyranny and licentiousness of the French had provoked the miserable vanquished into revolt. Milan had succeeded in expelling the invaders, and welcomed back its unfortunate and blood-stained sovereign, Ludovico Sforza.

Far from aiding Cæsar in his designs on Tuscany, the French not only withdrew their troops from his service, but demanded that he should instantly march with his own to their aid. But the open defection of his most powerful adherents, and the uncertain tenure of his conquests, rendered Cæsar deaf to any promptings of gratitude. He remained among his conquests, busily engaged in cementing them, while the French generals awaited in inaction the arrival of their king with a new army with which he was preparing to ravage Italy.

Meanwhile the league against the Borgias assumed a formidable consistency. The dispossessed barons assembled a considerable army on the frontiers of Romagna; the states of Milan, Ferrara, Pisa, the Florentines and Venetians, joined them in a powerful league. The French were believed to be exasperated with the defection of Cæsar during the revolt of Milan, and were besides scarcely able to retain their own position, driven to the foot of the Alps. The utter ruin of the Borgias seemed to impend; the deposition of Alexander was openly threatened. Cæsar himself appeared for a moment overwhelmed by the opposition which was formed against him; after sustaining several severe checks in arms, he had betaken himself to the resort of weakness—negotiation.

There were innumerable points of disunion in the confederacy, into which the subtle genius of the Borgias easily discerned how to drive their wedges. The Venetians and Florentines were divided by ancient grudges and rival pretensions; the feuds among the great barons were only lulled by the pressing perils without. The Bentivogli hated the Montefeltri; the Malatesta, the Sforza; the Perucci, the Baglioni; the Colonna, the Orsini; the Este, all. But the machinations of Cæsar appeared only in their effects. The Florentines sent him ambassadors to treat of a general peace: Ferrara made a truce with him, and the duke, Ereole d'Este, listened with eagerness to the proposals of Alexander, that his daughter, Lucrezia, should wed the heir of his ancient and glorious race. At the same time it was rumoured that Cæsar had cajoled the Orsini back to his interests, by offering the lady's hand to the heir of that powerful family, Paolo Orsini, son to the Duke of Gravina.

There was now a short lull in the storm which ravaged Italy, but it was gathering blacker and blacker on every point of the horizon. While the French, Spaniards, and Turks, with their allies the Swiss, Burgundians, Germans, and Moors, and the Italians themselves, were collecting all their energies to struggle for the possession of the beautiful land, its coasts were devastated by pirates, its cities sacked by robbers, the plague spread death and desolation throughout its length and breadth. It seemed as if Heaven intended the total extirpation of the Italian race!

And yet, amidst all this chaos, the serene glory of the arts arose like the day-spring from a turbulent ocean. Leonardo da Vinci had painted his masters-pieces, Michael Angelo was founding his school at Florenee, Raphael and Julio Romano were crayoning their first rude creations; the young Cellini was moulding his beauteous fancies in gold. The recent conquest of Constantinople, by the Turks, filled Italy with learned exiles, who revived the ancient taste for Hellenic literature. Ariosto made Ferrara illustrious with the dawn of his beautiful genius, that rainbow spanning the heavens of poesy, whose very tears are but weepings of sunshine. But it was chiefly as a school of arms that the unlettered nations of western Europe regarded Italy; and many of the pilgrims who now hastened to obtain their share of the indulgences so liberally showered on the faithful in the jubilee at Rome, contemplated the reereation of a campaign or so on their return, by way of indemnification for the fatigues they might undergo, nearly indifferent on what side they performed their achievements.

To this class, from their appearance, might be ascribed the leaders of an armed party which, towards the close of day, came slowly winding round the edge of one of those lofty precipices by which the Apennines descend into the plains of Umbria.

CHAPTER II.

THE PILGRIMS OF THE APENNINES.

"For, in this present volume may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good, and leave the ill, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown."—CAXTON, *Prologue to the Mort d'Author*.

The troop consisted of about twenty men, all well mounted, and wearing the usual accoutrements of the common soldiery of the age. The breast and back were protected with plates of steel, the head with a bassinet or cap of steel, and the rest of the person with stout embossed leather. Each was armed with a sword and lance, and to the saddle hung on one side a poleaxe, on the other a rude arquebuss of great size and weight, with conveniences to discharge it attached, in the shape of a coil of tarred rope, matches, and a flint. The rude fashioning of the armour, and the powerful limbs of the wearers, seemed to indicate men of some barbarian race, as the Italians still called and considered the transalpine nations. From the sprig of broom in the bassinets of the riders, a skilful herald would speedily have known they were English,—the broom flower being the cognizance of the kings of England, until the overthrow of the last of the Plantagenet race in the person of Richard III., an event which had taken place some dozen years previous to the commencement of our narrative. In addition to this badge, the soldiers wore another wrought in their mantles, a blazing sun, with the motto in the centre, "Oh ! mon Le Beaufort!"

The leaders of the party were literally so, for they kept considerably in advance of their troop, the immediate command of which was devolved on an inferior officer, as he seemed to be, who yet was not even of the lowest order of chivalry, as he did not wear the arms peculiar to an esquire. His accoutrements differed but little from those of his followers, but he carried a little flag or banderol on the point of his lance, and was furnished with a shield in addition to his arms of offence. So much of his visage as was visible from the steel cap, displayed a grim set of features, seamed with many a scar, short black hair, touched with gray, and a thick beard to correspond.

The foremost persons of the party were three in number. The eldest was apparently verging on forty, rode a mule, and from his habit was a secular canon. His features were long and sharp, his head rather bald, a capillary deficiency which he made up by a beard of patriarchal length and volume ; his eyes were full of expression and gaiety, and from the joyous cast of the countenance he might rather be taken for a disciple of Anacreon than of Augustine.

Resuming our description by age, the next would be a personage about thirty years old, of a tall and stately figure, who wore the habit of a Knight Hospitaller of St. John. A long black mantle, wrought in the leath with a white cross in eight points, covered nearly his whole person ; his feet and arms only appeared, except the head, and were cased in brass mail. His helmet was carried by one of the attendants, and his white hood was

drawn partially over his face to keep off the sun ; but the countenance which appeared from it was remarkable for the noble and austere beauty of its expression, shadowed with a deep cast of melancholy and pride. His black hair curling short round his temples and face, completed the effect of the high and imposing severity of character stamped on its princely lineaments. This expression was not unsuitable to the mingled professions of priest and warrior assumed by the Knights of St. John, who, in addition to their military devotion, were bound in the strict rules of chastity and obedience professed by the hermits of St. Augustine.

The third leader was apparently several years younger than the Knight of St. John, and from his golden spurs and arms was of similar rank, but of a lay order of chivalry. The elastic plates of silver mail in which he was clad from head to foot, displayed a figure of extraordinary strength and agility, though inferior in height to that of the Hospitaller, to whose gloomy garb his array brilliantly contrasted. The splendour of his appointments, indeed, amply supported the title, which from the emblazonment on his shield he seemed to have assumed, of the Knight of the Sun. His armour glittered like the lucid scales of a fresh-caught salmon, and on his breast it was so skilfully wrought into a blazing sun, that the luminary appeared as if reflected in a mirror. He wore a cap of silver tissue, in which was a sprig of purple broom ; and the joyous gallant countenance, which expressed careless good humour, reckless daring, and high spirits, well harmonized with the warlike coxcombry of his array. His complexion had been originally very fair, and the long brown hair and blue laughing hawk's eye marked his northern descent. But the fierce sun of Italy had embrowned the skin wherever it was not usually covered by the helmet, and presented something of the effect of a bronze mask, which, however, gave a soldierly and veteran look to the otherwise youthful and blooming countenance.

For some time the travellers had been winding up the steep brow of an acclivity, on a road which was formed only by cutting down a few trees, the trunks of which still remained half hidden among the grass, and made the horses stumble every instant. On one side was a lofty succession of dark desolate hills, at whose base they proceeded ; on the other stretched down a fathomless chaos of rocks, precipices, forests, and torrents, forming a mountainous valley, which seemed as if dashed together by nature in a fit of madness. Beyond the valley appeared a still vaster pile of hills towering one above the other like the Titans' stairs to heaven, until the topmost shone white as if with snow, and bounded the immense view.

The travellers proceeded for some time in silence, probably too fatigued for conversation, as they seemed to have made a long journey, their horses' tongues hanging out, and their breasts covered with foam. The English knight had been humming a roundelay in his own language—the chief words distinguished being “ Robin Hood, and the good greenwood.” But the still and sultry calm into which the evening gradually closed produced an effect even on his buoyant spirits.

“ Messer Benbo,” he said at last, addressing the ecclesiastic in good Italian, but with a foreign accent ; “ methinks this castle of yours, if it be not removed by faerie art, should now be somewhere in sight.”

“ I have noted the canon this last half hour or so, and he sometimes checks his mule as if he misdoubted his own guidance,” said the Hospitaller, with a quietly sarcastic smile.

“ No, monsignor, no,” replied the ecclesiastic, with nevertheless a

very puzzled countenance. “It is true that it is now seven years since I last found my way to my good friend Savelli’s castle; for since Ferrara and his holiness disagreed at the sword’s point, I have had but little occasion to go to Rome; and yet it distinctly appears to me as if in the old time it crowned the summit of this gorge, thereby commanding the pass, by the irrefragable sign that all who crossed the Apennines were compelled to come this way to pay their composition, and obtain the free leave and protection of my Lord Jacopo Savelli. He had a tower built over the road on purpose, and I myself once heard him order the portcullis to be driven down upon a gang of insolent traders of Genoa, who refused to pay what he ordered them,—three crowns, I think it was, a head, with a velvet robe for my lady, and ten fine wax candles for his lordship’s chapel.”

“And did it spike any of the jolly burghers?” said the young knight, laughing heartily.

“Nay, the fright was enough for them;” replied Messer Bembo, laughing also until his eye suddenly lighted upon the stern and displeased countenance of the Hospitaller. “But I am the more certain that we are in the right way now I observe yonder mountain, resembling a white cone projecting among the clouds, at the end of that promontory of woody rocks.”

“You are right as to the cone, Messer, but for the castle, by St. George, I do no more see it than the battlements of my father’s strong place of Beaufort, in England!” said the young knight.

“Let us push on; perchance the walls may be hidden in the height,” said Messer Bembo, pricking on his mule.

“Or perchance a cloud may be around it—and yet the sunmit shines very clear,” said the Hospitaller. “What say you, Messer Canonico, if the Borgia, when he crossed these mountains on his late ravages in Tuscany, took the opportunity to destroy a fortress belonging to so noted an enemy of his name!”

“I say, then, my royal lord, that we shall lodge worse than I thought, to-night,” replied Messer Bembo, dismally and with a sigh of weariness.

“How, Messer Pietro Bembo, will you ever forget my injunctions, and how much depends on their observation?” said the Knight Hospitaller, in an angry tone.

“Nay, monsignor, but the Borgias are all for making love to us now-a-days,” returned the canon submissively.

“And are, therefore, the more to be feared!” replied the Knight of St. John. “The Borgias regard no faith, human or divine; and if they had me in their power would, perhaps, compel me into this infernal marriage with their demon daughter.”

“Hush, or some of the fellows may hear us gabble, and only William of Bampton is to be trusted!” said the younger knight. “Not but that they are all very good rascals, and English to the backbone, but they are by no means aware of the wiles of this land, and oft mistake crafty wine for honest ale.”

“Then, monsignor, I would say, reverend brother, I marvel what brings you to Rome, for he who shuns the wolf, should surely not hide in his cave?” continued Messer Bembo.

“If there be any time sacred with the Borgia, it will surely be this of the glorious Christian jubilee,” replied the Hospitaller. “The vast multitude of pilgrims will render our arrival unnoticed, and while the city is in their hands they will not suffer so crying an enormity as the molestation

of one of their number. But," he continued with rising warmth, "no one knows better than thou, Pietro, my intent in journeying to Rome. Sithence my father is so blinded by his fears and policy, that he will not believe the hideous rumours afloat concerning this modern harpy, on report, and would compel me to accept her direful hand, I have sworn to learn the truth of all with mine own avouch; and then, if he persists in his resolution, I will take this holy and unwedding mantle in very earnest, and spend the remainder of my days fighting for the redemption of the Holy Sepulchre."

"Your brother, Monsignor Hippolito, would be grieved to hear you talk so, sir," said the canon, smiling.

"I blame thee not for the word, brother in arms," said the English knight, in a more serious tone than his galliard mood often prompted. "For methinks (if it be no sin to say so) even the holy father's uncleship should scarcely coax me into uniting the honours of my house, though inferior to yours, (albeit we are cousins to the king's mother, the Lady Margaret,) to the bastard brood of Borgia."

"But their actions, their actions!—I look the rasher to them!" said the Knight of St. John, with increasing vehemence.

"Look then what scant wisdom may come with gray hairs!" said Messer Bembo, smiling; "since the famously wise duke, Ercole, your father, consented to this project of your reverend lordship's solely in the belief that you would come back a convert to his own."

"Yea, for our poet legend-monger, Messer Ariosto, reports us such marvellous tales of this woman's beauty, as if it were of Helen of Troy!" returned the Knight of St. John, colouring and smiling, but with a strong curl of contempt. "You look only to the outside of things, you poets, Bembo; you suspect not the serpent among the rosemary. But were she beautiful as Venus, she hath too many of the impudent goddess's other qualities, to win aught but scorn and hatred from a soul like mine. The woman whom I love, Sir Reginald, must be pure in name as in deed, in deed as in spirit, in spirit as yonder summit of snow which mingles whiteness with the heavens!"

"Then, by the mass, you must not seek for her in Italy," replied Sir Reginald, setting his cap aside on his handsome audacious features, and smiling significantly; "at least so far as my experience warrants."

"Ay, it is such as thou, Le Beaufort!—it is the perpetual wars of which you barbarians make Italy your battle-field, which is gradually trampling out every noble quality in this once heroic land!" said the Hospitaller, sighing deeply.

"Then where would you recommend monsignor rather to seek a wife?—taking it that he hath assumed this holy garb only for a carnival time?" said Bembo, somewhat testily.

"I have abode long with him in Italy—let him return with me to England!" said the young knight enthusiastically; "there he will find maidens infinitely more beautiful than your sun-scorched women here, and as innocent as the pearls they deck their ringlets withal!"

"Colourless ghosts are not to my taste, Messer," replied Bembo, hastily.

"Colourless!—could you see my sweet consin Alice!" said the young knight. "I remember her with cheeks as ruddy as any rose; and I loved her so well, that meaning to wed her to my brother Henry, I believe 'twas one of the reasons they sent me to these Italian wars. But since he fell

by a Scottish lance they must have me home again, as if I were the sight of their eyes. Our Lady keep his soul!—but he hath left me a greater heir than ever I thought to be."

"Amen!" said the ecclesiastic tranquilly, crossing himself. "But you must abate something of the sharpness of your tongue against the brown Italian ladies, if you hope to obtain the dispensation to wed your cousin that was betrothed to your brother, for ladies have some influence at Rome, or they tell great lies that come from it."

"'Tis a traveller's trick, they say," observed the Knight of the Sun, slightly pricking his steed; "but I am not so unhandsomely put together as to be sorry for that. But, assuredly, Messer Bembo, your castle is one in the air, in many respects."

"Yet Luerezia Borgia is fair, not brown," said the Hospitaller musingly, without noticing this latter observation.

"The duke your father was ever held to be a wise man," said Messer Bembo slyly. "I have often heard it said that the golden-haired goddess herself was not fairer that day she sprang from ocean, while the waters blushed rosy red with delight and shame to see her unveiled charms."

"You are in Messer Ariosto's vein this sunset, Pietro," said the Hospitaller, somewhat sadly; "but it needs a very inventive genius to speak well of this lady."

"By the bouny broom-flower! to be so very married a damsel, I did never hear of one who bore so very evil a report," said Sir Reginald, laughing; and striking his long lance against the trunk of a beech-tree which shadowed the path, he struck off a huge piece of bark, much apparently to his content.

"Married! truly, I am to be the fourth husband this lady hath honoured with her rapid affections!" said the Hospitaller, with a tart smile; "or perchance it were speaking it more to the matter to say—person."

"Nay, monsignor, for a knight and eremite of holy Austin you speak it harshly," said Messer Bembo. "The first espousals were when she was a mere child, and I doubt whether she ever saw the betrothed gentleman; for she had not left the convent when her sire dissolved the contract, as a match unequal to his new dignities. The Lord of Pesaro she quarrelled with:—let me see, no, it was not at the altar—but the divorce was pronounced by a very solemn and unprejudiced tribunal. Then for the third—Don Alfonso of Arragon—poor lord, he did not survive his marriage long!"

"Murdered—assassinated! Who knows if not by her connivance?" said the Hospitaller. "Well may she be called in Rome the Fatal Bride!—and 'tis believed that I will consent to make the fourth! The first—mark you the gratitude of these Borgias!—was son of the Castilian gentleman who saved Alexander's life, in battle against the Moors of Granada, when, forsooth, he was a soldier! And yet, not satisfied with an ignominious breaking of the contract, he even compelled the old man to put his son in a manner to death by making a friar of him."

"My experience of friars, signor, leads me to think that many a ghost would be glad if you could prove the identity!" replied Bembo. "It is known how rash and headlong in all his passions the pontiff is—and was it not the very madness of gratitude to betroth a youth of twenty to a child in the cradle? And if he made a priest of him, it was probably to his good, that he might recompense his loss with the dignities and wealth at

his disposal ! I have heard it said, the young man was so deep a scholar, that he was fit for nothing but a Spanish bishopric or the president's chair at Bologna the learned ! ”

“ The second ! ” continued the Hospitaller vehemently, as if vexed at the apology, “ the second a dispossessed and shame-struck exile ; the third gashed all over, then strangled ! You shall pardon me.”

“ But may not the unhappy lady herself be innocent, whoever is guilty of these atrocities ? ” said Bembo earnestly.

“ It is burned into my soul—those direful lines of Pontano ! ” said the Hospitaller, vehemently. “ They were put in the mouth of the death's-head which was served to me at table, in a golden ewer, that day my father feasted Cæsar's ambassadors, who brought the proposal of this black alliance.”

He then repeated, in a dark and brooding tone, the hideous distich which has been one of the chief means of rendering the name of Lucrezia Borgia portentous in the ear of posterity.

“ *Lucretia, nomine, sed re—
Thais. Alexandri filia, sponsa, nurus.*”

CHAPTER III.

THE DOMINICAN.

“ Man's life is all a mist, and in the dark
Our fortunes meet us ”—DRYDEN.

A deep and somewhat awful silence followed for some minutes, and then Messer Bembo spoke in a low and timid tone in reply.

“ Calumny spares not even the saints in bliss,” he said dubiously. “ Then wherefore should a lying Neapolitan poet, who for the turn of an epigram, or to give it an acuter sting, would speak worse of the devil than he deserves, or of himself even, who is not so good a fellow ! ”

“ Calumny bath not spared so reverend a man as yourself, Messer Pietro,” said the English knight. “ Nay, she speaks even ill of me, who never gave her the least occasion which I could muster virtue to forego.”

“ Thou art a very Sir Galaor indeed, who, they say, matched Sir LanceLOT in everything but constancy,” said the Hospitaller, with a grave smile.

“ Constancy ! —the rogue,—to his king's wife ! ” returned the Knight of the Sun. “ You may measure his faith by his faithlessness : but in very sooth, Messer Bembo, I think your castle must have belonged to Fairy Morgana, and has sunk in the rocks as hers sink in the waves.”

“ By this good lamp of day, which is fast going out, on this summit once stood as fair a fortalice as nature and art, plotting together, could build ! ” said the canon, checking his exhausted mule, and staring amazingly around.

The three leaders had now reached a lofty table-land, formed by the summits of a vast rock, shaped as irregularly as if an earthquake had tossed a mountain in the air, and let it fall in fragments. The men-at-arms, on their wearied horses, straggling up the prodigious ravine after

them, had disappeared, and by a singular illusion of the perspective, the amphitheatre of forests which towered one above another on the mountains beyond, seemed only separated by air. Before the travellers the rocks descended in layers of blue cliffs, densely clothed in pines and stunted oaks, until they formed two lofty walls, in which flowed a river; or rather torrent, the roar of which was audible, but the waves were lost in the darkness of the ravine through which they thundered. Based on the opposite cliffs, arose apparently an endless succession of mountains of a strange bluish snowy tint, interspersed with masses of darkness which looked like the wavering shadows of vast forests. But after gazing for a few moments, the rapid changes of the shapes of these mountains convinced the travellers that it was an illusion produced by the sun setting behind those on which they stood, and throwing a reflection of their outlines on the mists which arose steaming from the plains below.

“It was here, it was undoubtedly on this spot that the castle of Jacopo Savelli stood!” exclaimed Messer Pietro, glancing back in amazement at the endless succession of mountains, and the piles of rocks whose summits still glowed red-hot in the setting luminary. “I remember often bemusing how these cliffs resembled battlements of gigantic castles, such as the greater Morgan might have inhabited.”

“There are yet traces of walls, and yonder still stands a watch-tower hanging to a shattered battlement!” said the Hospitaller. “The spoiler’s work has been well done, for it looks as ruined as aught of the Roman time.”

The Hospitaller slightly pricked his horse with the spur, but the English knight suddenly clutched him back by the rein, exclaiming, “*Sancta Maria!*—see you not, monsignor, how long the grass grows? the ground is deeply hollowed.”

“Truly, and I thank yon, brother Reginald,” said the elder knight, slightly startled. “The fortress has been destroyed with gunpowder, and it has rent some ghastly depths.”

“See you not, as it were, some huge words sculptured on the red cliff yonder, on which stood the donjon?” said Bembo, pointing opposite, across the ruins, to a rock which was the highest of the whole group.

“You are a scholar and may tell us—Father Ambrosius could never get me beyond my letters,” replied the young knight.

“It is Latin, but very legible even at this distance,” said the Hospitaller. “We cannot move in Italy, but we find the traces of this ravaging beast: *AUT CÆSAR, AUT NIHIL.* But what is yonder? There are signs of more recent conflict than these grass-grown ruins announce.” He pointed, as he spoke, with his lance to an object which attracted his attention, at the foot of one of the sharp precipices which edged the ruined fortalice. There sprawled a figure which, by the gleam of armour, and the inanimate manner in which it lay, appeared to be the corpse of a soldier.

“Perhaps the man may be only asleep; let us call him,” said the canon, adding in a shrill and terrified tone, “Friend, in a holy name, who art thou?”

“If he be asleep, ‘tis in a very dangerous spot,” observed the Hospitaller. “The duty of the order I have assumed is to protect travellers; I will arouse him.”

And vaulting with practised agility from his powerful steed, he flung the reins to the canon, who shook so that he could scarcely take them.

“Nay, then, brother, you shall have a companion; these mountains are

peopled with banditti, and this may be some ambush," said he of the Sun, dismounting with equal rapidity, and hastening to join the Hospitaller, who strode on before.

"Wait at least, good my lords, until our people gather; for all our preservations, I adjure you!" groaned the prudent ecclesiastic; but the young knights seemed to take no notice of what he said.

"Oh, what a world is this below; but what a heaven there is above!" said the poetical canon, who looking devoutly up for celestial aid, was struck with the exceedingly beautiful blue of the sky, in which myriads of stars beamed silvery pale, though daylight lingered yet.

But he had scarcely uttered the exclamation when his attention was recalled to sublunary concerns by a sudden hiss and snarl close to the feet of his mule, which began to plunge violently, notwithstanding its weariness. Probably startled by the advance of the intruders, a wolf rushed out, and half rolled and half ran down a precipice to the right, in a panic fully equal to that of Messer Bembo. But dismayed at the apparition, he滑ed down from the mule, and leaving it wildly striking out with its heels in every direction in which it apprehended the enemy might approach, hastened to join his companions, whose lances he observed gleaming in the distance.

In the course of his progress, struggling with thorn bushes or plunging into hollows full of stagnant water, the canon perceived how it was that the fortalice had so nearly vanished. Large fragments of the ruins had been hurled among the precipices by the explosion which had destroyed it, and the rest was hidden by the rank and rapid vegetation which delights in covering decay. Stumbling among the ruins in his eagerness to rejoin his companions, Messer Bembo observed with extreme horror several figures lying about the bulrushes, whose immovability, strange attitudes, and garbs discoloured with blood and rain, convinced him that they were bodies of recently slaughtered men. Avoiding as much as possible even to glance at the direful forms, the canon at length reached the two knights, who were standing in discourse at the edge of the cliff which bore the inscription. The carcass which had first excited their attention lay directly below, partially stripped, and so gnawed by wolves and crows that the face was gone, and much of the body which was not defended by the steel garniture which it had carried. A bush of wild raspberries grew close beside it, and the ripe red fruit hung over the silent slain.

"This at least is probably not Cæsar's work," said the English knight. "Yonder are the embers of a fire, and a half-roasted kid; they have been travellers surprised by banditti."

"Let us hasten away!" said Messer Bembo, crossing himself with more devotion than he had yet displayed. "Madonna herself can scarcely protect us against these villains!"

"Are we sure this is none of the Borgia's work?" said the Hospitaller thoughtfully. "Note ye the badge in yon unhappy crow-pudding's murion? Mark you, Messer Bembo—the bear? The Orsini's crest, whom he so hates!"

"The man is a very devil—that I should pronounce such a name—for who sits there?" exclaimed the canon, turning white and blue by turns as he pointed up to a hollow in the cliff just above the triumphant inscription. A raven partially gray with his century of years was perched on it, and seemed to watch the intruders with keen vindictive eyes.

"Again, I say, let us hence, in our blessed Mother's name!" continued the canon; "the night closes in, and if we do not find a lodging soon we shall get among the mists, and go headlong down some precipice which will not leave us a whole bone in our skins. I remember there is a monastery at no great distance, which he will not have destroyed, because it is a dependence of the Holy See. There, at least, we shall find shelter; but for our fare I can promise little, because they are of a severe rule, and keep it."

"And some of the good brothers will give these poor souls Christian earth to lie in," said Sir Reginald. "Have with you, Messer Benbo; come, brother, our tariance here does the dead no good."

The Hospitaller complied in silence, and they returned to the spot where Bembo had parted with his mule. They found the animal quietly munching some thistles, while William of Bampton stood with his gaunt figure erect in the stirrups, straining his eyes in amazement at the disappearance of the leaders. The men-at-arms had halted in a picturesque and disordered group among the rocks.

Under guidance of Messer Bembo the whole troop now filed down an excessively steep declivity facing the cloud-mountains which we have mentioned. It wound, he said, into the depths of the ravine, to the river, by whose course he hoped to find their way to the monastery, which was somewhere on its banks. The precipitous character of the road, if road, it could be called, soon compelled all the riders to dismount and lead their beasts, fearing lest they should roll overhead into the ravine—all, except Messer Bembo, who trusted more in the steadiness of his mule's feet than in his own.

The danger increased as they gradually became involved in the white mist, which made the air as thick and hazy as the steam of boiling water. But the increasing loudness of the roar of the river convinced them that they were pursuing the right path. At length they entered a narrow ravine cloven by a torrent on its way to the main stream, in which now flowed scarcely sufficient water to wet the hoofs of the horses. The rocks on each side gradually heightened, for the path was in truth a fissure in the mountains formed by some terrific eruption of their volcanic depths.

This path emerged by a narrow opening into the river. It was a stream of considerable depth, bordered on each side by lofty cliffs of volcanic strata, quite bare to the summits, where they were crowned by forests of the dismal pine. The river descended in so rapid an inclination, that but for the innumerable rocks among which its violent current churned and roared, it would have been impassable. The velocity of the torrent was further checked by the numerous deep caves in the bases of the rocks, in which the waters were diverted, sometimes into deep stagnant ponds, at others into whirlpools that played and flashed like ringy lightning.

Messer Bembo was rather puzzled, for he could not, even with the assistance of resting his chin on his hand, exactly remember whether the monastery was above or below the entrance to the main stream. But as he recollects that it formed a cataract at some short distance above the monastery, the Hospitaller recommended that they should follow the course of the river until they ascertained whether they were above or below the fall.

By a singular phenomenon, not unusual in mountain atmospheres, the mist hung several feet above the level of the waters, so that the upper parts of the riders' persons were involved in it, while their steeds stood in a

glassily clear air. The men-at-arms were ordered to halt where they were, while the canon and the two knights pursued the course of the river, to ascertain the point in doubt. Sir Reginald took a horn which hung to William of Bampton's saddle, and it was only on a signal blast from him that the wearied soldiers were to advance.

The horses gladly entered the bed of the cool waves, and after slaking their thirst, moved down the centre of the stream, which it was necessary to keep, the sharp rocks and deep gulfs allowing no passage along the base of the cliffs.

“These caves are said to be the haunts of dragons, where they brood over hidden treasures,” said Messer Bembo, smiling, but taking care to keep abreast with the Knight of St. John. “Yet for all I am with two such noble chevaliers, I could be very ill content to see the glittering green head poking out of one of them.”

“Sir Reginald will have the first brush; see you how he is urging on his horse?” said the knight. “But, look, what is yonder? In sooth it resembles the vast, glittering back of a dragon weltering across our path!”

“Ha, Madonna! it is the edge of the cataract! Hist, sir knight! the uproar drowns my voice, and the thick-headed barbarian is making his horse capriole!” exclaimed the canon, clasping his hands. “He will be dashed to pieces; it falls to such a depth that it is lost in foam long ere it reaches the rock below!”

But the Hospitaller listened only to the first words of this warning, and dashing the spurs into his horse compelled it to gallop forward through the whirling waters, to the rescue of his brother-in-arms. As he approached, however, he discerned that it was not carelessness which was conducting the young knight as it seemed to inevitable destruction. His steed, terrified to madness with the uproar, was struggling furiously to break away, and in the contest for the mastery was rapidly getting down to where the smooth eel-like flow of the wave denoted the great depth of its current ere it overleaped the precipices in a cataract. In vain did the knight endeavour to control the furious animal's violence, while his fearless spirit, and perhaps the danger of sinking under the weight of his arms in the waters, hindered him from seeking safety by leaping off. The destruction of the youthful chevalier seemed inevitable, when, as if sent by some direct and miraculous interposition, a tall figure garbed as a Dominican monk rushed into the stream before it, whence no one could discern, and seizing the horse's head with mighty force, rather hurled than drove it headlong back on its haunches, and after a struggle as it seemed of main strength, compelled it to halt.

CHAPTER IV.

“I blame not him who discredits, for indeed, with the proof in my hand, myself could doubt it.”—*Truth's Troubles*.

“Gramercy, our Lady!—Gramercy, good sir monk! fie, to be a monk with an arm like thine, which could bear down a stand of pikes,” exclaimed Sir Reginald, panting for breath, and unclasping his gorget.

"My cousin, fair Alice, must surely be praying for me now, to bring thee so in the very nick."

"Your horse, sir knight, is in this instance the wiser animal of the two; he feels the danger coming," replied the monk, hurriedly. "The torrent-wind! the torrent-wind!—call to your companions to make to the shelter of the rocks on this side, for I see it is tearing up the water along the whole line of the river to the left."

Singular as was this intimation, the commanding tones and gestures of the monk induced Le Beaufort to act as if he clearly understood the nature of the approaching danger. He shouted and waived to his friends to quit the centre of the stream, and join him behind the projecting rocks, to which the Dominican had forced his courser to retreat. They had barely time to act upon the counsel, ere a rushing roar, louder than the noise of the cataract, which seemed as if the mountains were rending in an earthquake, broke upon their hearing. Rider and horse stiffened alike with amazement and terror, for while the air where they stood was scarcely sufficient to lift the manes of their horses, a whirlwind of prodigious violence, which must have hurried them over the abyss, had they stood in its line of advance, roared along the left shore of the river, and drove the waters before it like a herd of snow-white bulls rushing over each other in mad confusion. Wind and waves thundered on to the edge of the cataract, where a singular phenomenon, sometimes observed in the mountainous regions of the north, took place. The wind, pursuing its impetuous career over the torrent, cleared away the mist which overhung it, in a circle, and for a few moments revealed a scene of great beauty and grandeur. The torrent might be seen foaming wildly down among vast rocks, until it reached the bed of a river which flowed through a narrow but richly wooded valley formed by an amphitheatre of rocks, the bases in their turn of mountains which towered above, until lost in blue sublimity. The amphitheatre opening directly in front, revealed an immense plain, bounded only by the Mediterranean, the waters of which were distinctly visible, rolling of a dark violet hue against the bright line of the sunset.

Midway down the ravine, through which the torrent thundered, although the eye at first scarcely noticed it, the rocks projected and receded in such a manner as to allow space and verge for the monastery of which our travellers were in search. A wall running round the edge of some cliffs, and two old gray towers, were all that was visible of it among the windings of the rocks, and the shadows of the overhanging pine and beech trees. A bridge formed by a single arch, bare and undefended, spanned a narrow neck which the opposite cliffs formed below the monastery, and no other means of approach could be discerned. But the whole landscape vanished almost immediately, for when the whirlwind had passed, the mists again arose in their cloudy masses.

"They will feel this wind, ere many hours elapse, on the sea," said the Dominican, as if following with his gaze the career of the tempestuous visitor.

"The Holy Virgin have pity on mariners then," said Le Beaufort, crossing himself.

"And on all men; all need it," returned the monk.

"Surely the devil rode in it, with his whole sabbath of witches," continued the astonished English knight. "But how, brother, by what rare gift did you behold this wind coming?"

"Nay, 'tis a four-footed beast that sees the wind," replied the monk, somewhat churlishly, for he spoke without the least appearance of jocularity.

"Holds the proverb true of your red Italian pig?" said the knight, good-naturedly smiling. "Howbeit, I am your debtor, and I pray you take this gold chain of thirty links, and hang it on your holiest shrine, an offering from Reginald Le Beaufort. Nay, 'tis no unlawful plunder, but a reward given me by the noble Duke of Ferrara that day his son and I kept the lists at Fossombrone against all comers, for one mortal rise and set, without once being worsted. What ails the man that he will not take it?"

"I am a humble brother of the beatified Dominic, and not of the Carthusians who inhabit this solitude, to whose saint your offering is due," replied the Dominican, glancing at his white habit. "But you may well mistake these bedabbled robes for russet. From Ferrara? Methought your Italian rung with a touch of the tramontane iron in it!—You and these gentlemen are doubtless of France?"

"St. George forbid, or that I should mate with caitiffs who fly at the blast of an English trumpet, as if it were Roland's," exclaimed Sir Reginald. "And foul fall the day when any Englishman shames to say as I would in the world's teeth—I am one. These gentlemen, my friends, are worthily approved Italian knights, belonging to the Duke of Ferrara."

"How say you, sir? when one is a black Knight of St. John, the other an ecclesiastic," exclaimed the monk.

"True, I had forgotten, my brains are whirling on a mill-wheel," muttered the English knight, confusedly; and the canon, who had several times made an effort to break the conversation, although the roar of the waters prevented his hearing distinctly what was said, hastened to the rescue.

"We are all on a holy vow to the jubilee," he said. "But methinks we shall be starved, or blown to death, or murdered by banditti, on the road, unless some Christian will guide us in mercy to a shelter."

The priestly knight's hood was blown back by the wind, in his rapid advance, and the Dominican surveyed him as it seemed with a particular degree of attention from the depths of the cowl in which his own countenance was so completely shaded as almost to baffl scrutiny. But the singularly fiery gleam of his eyes, the haggard outline of the features duskily discernible, his great stature, and the musical depth and sweetness of his voice, were potent challenges to curiosity.

"I will do my endeavour, for I seek some such matter myself, brother," returned the monk. "More especially as—but that it is well known that Mousignor Don Alfonso has crossed the Alps, I could almost have dreamed, despite that sacred habit, that I beheld the prince himself in the weeds of a Knight Hospitaller."

"Nay, there are many gentlemen in Italy who resemble the good Duke Ercole, for I never heard that he was a hater of the fair," said Messer Bembo, hastily interposing. "But prithee how is this convent to be reached, for we have already been disappointed in a castle, where we had made up our minds to sup and sleep? but man proposes—the proverb rhymes."

"But is surely not often true, or where are we to look for refuge?" replied the Dominican, in a mournful and musing tone. "I was seeking a path in these rocks by which to descend to the valley below the torrent, in which the convent is situated, when I heard your horse's struggles.

But there is a truer proverb than yours, Messer Canonico, that, what strips the sheep clothes the hedge, fer 'tis an extreme misfortune to a noble gentleman which has brought me hither to be your guide."

"What hath happed, I pray you?" said the canon, with great eagerness.

"I bear news which will spread a general consternation in Rome," replied the Dominican. "A most noble gentleman of the Orsini family, passing through these mountains with few attendants, on a secret mission, 'tis said, from the confederated barons to our Holy Father, has been seized by banditti, and his retinue murdered. Yesternight, returning from Loretto, I was surprised by a party of the same band, who would have forced me to grant them absolution."

"And you refused, brother?" interrupted Bembo, startled at the magnanimity of the deed.

"Yea, though they threatened to roast my feet off at a slow fire," replied the Dominican, calmly. "Finding that I was inflexible, they offered me my liberty on condition that I took a message from them to Rome, demanding a ransom of ten thousand gold crowns for their prisoner's redemption. At first I refused, whereupon they blindfolded and led me to some cavern in these rocks, known only to themselves, where they have confined the Orsino. After showing him to me at a distance, chained to a rock, in which was sculptured a colossal crucifixion, the captain of the robbers, or disbanded soldiers, for I know not which they are, swore to me that until some messenger, and but one, returned with the ransom, the unfortunate gentleman should neither taste of food nor drink, were it to be but one day or all time."

"Monsters without faith, hope, or charity!" exclaimed Messer Bembo.

"Why then pause you even for an instant, brother?" said the Knight of St. John.

"It is not long since they released me, after vainly attempting to move them to mercy; and, as I have told you, I cannot find the way to the valley below," replied the monk.

"Can you not guide us to the place where these banditti await their ransom; I bear one in my scabbard," said Le Beaufort, with his characteristic impetuosity.

"Your ancestors, indeed, have fought at great odds, but not as one to forty," said the Dominican.

"We are more than muster here," replied Le Beaufort. "A wind of my horn summons twenty stout fellows, whose flesh hath borne iron so long, that it something partakes of its qualities."

"It were in vain; the brigands know all the passes of these mountains, and could easily elude our search, and would perhaps murder their prisoner in their rage," said the Dominican. "But I will tell you a strange imagination which haunts me. How we entered the cavern I cannot divine; they bandaged me high up in the mountains, and when they suffered me to remove the fillet, I found myself in a craggy cleft, overlooking the hollow rocks which form the cave. But I noticed a yawning mouth of granite at one extremity, and from the foaming clouds which every moment rushed in, and the infinite uproar, I imagined that it was below the fall of some torrent. Moreover, the crucifixion helped to kindle my suspicions."

"Suspicious, brother, in so blessed a sign?" interrupted the canon.

"Hear me out, master canon," said the Dominican, in the same imper-
turbable narrative tone. "The disciple of St. Bruno, who, three hundred
years ago, founded a convent of his order in these mountains, was an
anchorite who abode in a cavern over which this torrent falls—a blessed
silence compared with the distracting tumults of the world. With his own
hands he struck a crucifixion out of the solid rock, which is recorded
among the good deeds which enabled the church to canonize him among
her triumphant warriors. He died one night alone in his cell, and when
the Carthusians came to bury him, they found that his body was gone,
and only a heavenly perfume remained, as if angels had been there.
Many pious pilgrims came to visit the cave, but as no other means of
entering it were known but by passing through the cataract, so many lost
their lives in the attempt that it was at length forbidden by a papal bull
to make it. Yet, I cannot help thinking, there must be some secret entry
to the cave, which the Carthusians may have concealed, as there were
rumours raised that the saintly founder was assassinated on account of the
extreme severity of his government, and which the robbers may have
accidentally discovered."

"'Tis a strange tale, indeed, to be true," said Messer Bembo with a
slight sneer. "But if matters stand thus, I would advise you to hasten
on your journey to Rome."

"The Orsini have good reasons for keeping their treasures out of Rome,
and I doubt if, even in this exigency, and to redeem the heir of their
great house, they could raise ten thousand gold crowns anywhere nearer
than Venice—too late to save the young lord from his menaced doom!"
returned the monk, eying the Hospitaller with keen attention.

"The heir of the Orsini!—what, Signor Paolo?" exclaimed the latter
with visible interest, adding in a colder tone, "Why, since the Borgias
intend him for their son-in-law, the rusty ducats of the Vatican will
surely be forthcoming were the sum ten times to be told."

The monk laughed, but it was gloomily and derisively, without the
least tinge of mirth.

"If you listen to the little birds singing, an' they be wise, ye will hear
them say little on that matter," he said. "'Tis known what remarkable
love the Borgias have as yet shown to their sons-in-law, and I see not
why they should display less tenderness towards one who is also the
great strength of their rebels against them, whose subtlety, if any can
above ground, matches their own."

"In the plain vulgar tongue, brother of St. Dominic, tell us what you
mean?" adjured the canon, with a bewildered stare.

"Moreover, duke Valentino is at Faenza, carrying on his siege there,
and the Pope is not so headstrong and fierce as of old, and does nothing
without direction," returned the monk, apparently avoiding a direct
answer.

"Is not Cæsar's lieutenant, Don Remiro, that wolf of justice who hath
so nigh extirpated the Black Bands, to be found in Romagna?" said the
Hospitaller. "Tut, tut, there is always a long stream of blood flowing
from his abode whereby to find him."

"Force were of no avail; they will flee and take their secret with
them," replied the Dominican. "Moreover, Paolo is probably at this
moment dying of cold, hunger, and terror, in the dismal cavern below.
But I marvel not that friends to the Duke of Ferrara should be willing to
let his son's rival perish, even by so terrible a doom."

"Now, by our Lady's tears at the cross, I will not leave these mountains until I have redeemed Paolo Orsino, or shared his fate," exclaimed the generous Hospitaler, with sudden vehemence.

"And as we are the very cow and calf of knighthood, by the same, I will not leave you until this matter be determined," said Sir Reginald; and, raising his horn, he blew a cheerful blast: but he had no great occasion for that expenditure of breath, as the men-at-arms, wearied and alarmed at the long delay, came straggling into sight.

"It is a profane and heathen tempting of Providence, a wicked oath, from which I absolve you both," said the canon, infinitely alarmed; but without heeding his rebuke, the knights entreated the monk to endeavour to recollect if he had no clue by which to guide them to the adit possessed by the robbers. He shook his head mournfully.

"Then let us even take the blessed saint's own way, and clamber up the torrent," said the gallant English knight.

"It is possible the Carthusians may have some tradition left, which may be easier to follow than you might find it to climb a rope of water," replied the Dominican. "At all events the night is coming, and you will need torches. Moreover your armour must be laid aside in such an attempt, for it requires the liteness of the serpent to glide among those slippery chasms, where a false step is perdition. Therefore let us in the first place find out our way to the monastery,—and yonder methinks—nay 'tis certain—is the cleft for which I have been searching so long."

CHAPTER V.

"By the pricking of my thumbs
Something wicked this way comes."—*Macbeth*.

The sun was now completely set, and the shadows of the rocks had shifted, so that some which had been concealed projected, and others vanished into darkness. A red glare down a pile of massy rocks crowned with pines of immense height, the trunks of which were so weather-stained as to seem of old rusty iron, revealed a steep and very narrow defile, which, after ascending for a short time, apparently broke off abruptly in mid air.

But on reaching the summit, under guidance of the Dominican, the travellers found that the path continued, descending through a sloping forest, which clothed the sides of one of those wild sierras. Thence, by a winding succession of precipices over the torrent, they emerged on a species of platform of bare rocks, on which one side of the bridge rested.

To cross this bridge, which was scarcely wide enough for a single passenger, which had no parapet, and which seemed to shake with the thunder of the cataract, whose white waves rolled at a ghastly depth below, appeared scarcely a possible feat for a horseman. But Le Beaufort, laughing at the canon's exclamations of terror, set spurs to his horse, and crossed the bridge at a gallop, waving his hand in triumph when he reached the opposite ledge. The Knight of St. John followed more leisurely, but with even greater coolness, for he checked his steed in

the centre of the bridge, and surveyed the cataract with calm attention.

The waters rushing in a vast body over the highest pile of rocks, fell in one headlong sheet to another which jutted considerably, and on which they dashed themselves into a sea of foam, rolling over in a hundred separate torrents, which in their turn were flung and torn to pieces on the precipices they encountered in their descent. The hollow darkness below the projecting rocks of the second fall, marked the entrance to the cavern ; but the Hospitaller's attention was caught by a strange red glow on the impetuous waters which rolled over it, as if from some fire within. As he gazed, it died out, and he was left in doubt whether it was an illusion of his imagination, or some phenomenon peculiar to those volcanic regions.

Meanwhile the canon was shouting lustily to him to cross and leave the way clear, for although in mortal trepidation, there was no resource but to follow. The canon's mule took the bridge steadily, while he himself endeavoured by stretching both arms to assist in keeping the balance. But whether from the force of imitation, or from some good reason of its own, the mule paused directly in the centre of the bridge, and in spite of all the canon's earnest entreaties and caresses, for he dared not provoke it to open mutiny by blows, would not stir a single inch until William of Bampton, who followed, pricked it boldly in the haunch with his spear. Setting its tail, and uttering a shrill cry, the mule then tremblingly advanced, and, by slow degrees, during which the canon crossed himself a hundred times, they reached *terra firma* in safety. The men-at-arms followed in an orderly file.

The Dominicain brought up the rear, and as the twilight had now deepened into darkness, the knights awaited his passage with some anxiety. Both the Hospitaller and Sir Reginald perceived him reach the middle of the bridge, where he too halted, as if struck with some object before him, to which he visibly pointed. The knights looked in the direction indicated, and again observed the mysterious glare lighting up the torrent with extreme splendour, for an instant. When they looked round, the monk had disappeared.

All united in declaring that he had not crossed the bridge, neither had any one observed him return, or fall. Exceedingly alarmed and surprised, the two leaders dismounted and crossed over the bridge in search of their guide, but could discern no traces of him, nor obtain any reply to the shouts with which they almost overpowered the unceasing roar of the waters. If he had fallen over, he must certainly have been instantly dashed to pieces, and his shattered carcass hurried away by the rapid stream. But those black depths denied all means of ascertaining, and the only contrary hope which they could devise, was that the monk had taken panic at the prospect of the enterprise in which he had engaged them, and had withdrawn from any share in its prosecution. With this thought, however, mingled a superstitious feeling, which, although none avowed, all felt, and which both the appearance and disappearance of the stranger were well calculated to excite.

Engaged in sombre rumination on their adventure, the travellers at length proceeded on their way, guided by the distant chaunt of the Carthusians at vespers, and reached a massive gate between two high cliffs, formed of slender pine-boles, welded together with iron. A twisted brass horn, finely polished, hung as at the drawbridge of some giant's castle in old romance ; which, when Sir Reginald blew it, gave

out a singularly wild screeching blast, being probably fashioned so as to utter a shrill cry which could be distinguished amidst the noise of the near waters.

There was a short pause, and then an old monk made his appearance, after withdrawing two vast wooden bolts. He wore the dull red Carthusian garb, fastened round the waist by a rope, to which hung a wooden cross; but true to his obligation of silence, he made no reply to the knight's request to be allowed shelter for the evening, beyond pointing to the monastery which was immediately in front.

With this tacit permission they continued their road, and arrived at a narrow causeway, by which they ascended to a still narrower portcullis, above which, piled among the rocks, and sometimes perhaps cut in their substance, arose the monastery. Knocking with their spears at the gate, a monk appeared at the window of a tower above the portcullis, and after reconnoitring, set some machinery in motion, by which the portcullis was raised. They then found themselves in a long narrow yard, cut in the rock, on each side of which were caves artificially excavated, and which were probably intended to be used by travellers as stables. Immediately they had entered, the portcullis was lowered behind them, and having performed this duty, the janitor himself descended.

The monk was a lay brother, and seemed to be exempt from the periodical fit of silence to which the Carthusian rule subjects its members. He received the travellers with bland courtesy, and regretted the badness of the accommodations which he had to offer, especially as the best at his disposal were already occupied by a numerous company of soldiers, escorting the ambassador of Florence to Rome. He added, that the prior was at vespers in the chapel, but would see them as soon as he had concluded his devotions; pointed out what premises were unoccupied in the rock-stables, and where they might find straw for their horses, and invited the commanders to follow him into the monastery forthwith. He then led the way up a very steep succession of stairs, cut at intervals in the rock, and ushered them into the great hall of the convent.

As this apartment had formerly been a natural cavern, it presented an exceedingly gloomy aspect, being of great extent, with windows only on one side, hewn in the solid granite, and set exceedingly deep. It was crossed at intervals by archways, marking the termination of many flights of stairs, leading by galleries to the upper parts of the monastery. In the centre of the hall was a long stone table, with benches of the same material immovably fixed, for they were cut in the rock. A pulpit, supported on a pillar, was similarly sculptured in the wall, from which a monk usually read some passages of the Scriptures or homilies during every meal. Five or six pinewood torches were stuck in holes at far intervals in the granite, and shed a dismal swarthy light, the gloom of which was not diminished by the enormous pile of red embers which glowed on the hearth in a cave, or rather chimney, at the extremity of the hall.

The travellers found here the party with whom they were to share the hospitality of the alpine fathers. In addition to several long-bearded, silent Carthusians, who were engaged in attendance on their guests, the stone table was occupied by some thirty men-at-arms, feeding on a kind of black barley bread, cheese, curds, and milk. Beside each man, crossing the table, lay a spear nearly double his own height, its point barbed like a fish-hook, so that on being withdrawn from a wound, the flesh must be fearfully lacerated: their armour was at once strong and rich, bright

from the smithies of Milan, and apparently manufactured in imitation of the ancient Roman military garb—greaves of polished steel, bare knees, short kilts of quilted steel, breast and back pieces of gleaming plate, helmets surmounted by silver eagles with outspread wings and sun-soaring upward gaze. A round shield with a pike in the centre, a short sword, and a massive mace intended to knock those on the head whose armour denied the sword access when overthrown, completed the uniform.

It needed not the additional emblem of Cæsar Borgia's motto encircling the arms of the church in their mantles, to inform the new comers that they beheld a detachment of the terrible guard of that leader, known throughout Italy for their cruelties and valour. He had selected this body from almost all the nations which battled in Italy, and principally of those whose ferocity and crimes had rendered them outcasts even from the direful armies which disgorged them, and whose wild wolf natures he alone had found it possible to control. Accordingly their complexions presented almost every hue, from the sable Moor to the white-haired German; but all were men of great stature, and remarkable for their and muscle only to be acquired by lives of toil, and the fierce exercise of war.

Seated in a vast wooden chair, a seat of distinction usually appropriated to the superior of the monastery, for all the other seats were stools, basking as it were in the warm refulgence of the fire, sat a personage whom this formidable escort attended. He was a man in the prime of life, of a good stature, somewhat spare in flesh, with sharply defined, but handsome Italian features. His eyebrows had an habitual curve downward, as if accustomed to brooding thoughtfulness, the mouth in repose had an expression of singular unhappiness; but whenever they broke from this musing calm, the eyes and features lighted up with a satirical, and yet jocose brilliancy, and his smile was full of humour and vivacity.

This personage wore a long crimson cloak, probably the ensign of some dignity, for the rest of his garb was of dark velvet, and, for an age delighting in rich garnitures, exceedingly plain. He was apparently amusing himself with watching the gambols of one of those unhappy attendants on ancient grandeur, whose office it was to entertain their rude lords with the vagaries of their disordered and reckless wits, whose brightest sparkles indeed were supposed to be caused by the flaw in the understanding, as a broken mirror distorts and splinters the light into effects more curious and brilliant than the smoothest surface.

The fool or jester in question, however, was evidently no ordinary member of the hairbrained fraternity. His figure, as displayed in his motley garb, was remarkable for its grace and suppleness, and although not powerful, and of common height, yet its exceeding limberness and serpent-like vivacity of movement would have made even a gladiator pause with the feeling with which the strongest eye any animal of the reptile species ere attacking it. His features, as well as could be ascertained amid the grotesque daubing and patches which covered it, were fine in outline and almost femininely delicate in finish. His mouth might have been called beautiful, but that when at rest, it remained parted with a slight, but very odious expression of bloodthirstiness. But the eyes were the most singular; they were set very deeply under his perfectly arched brows, and might without any exaggeration be compared to diamonds in sparkle and infinite variety of tint—sometimes a glow merely with un-

meaning glitter, at others flaming with strange wildness and the multitudinous feverish fancies of a mind diseased.

The jester was busied in playing with or rather teasing two enormous bloodhounds which shared the hearth with him, endeavouring with many antic tricks and allurements to induce them to put their great paws into the hot embers to draw out some chestnuts which he was roasting. The dignitary was so absorbed in laughing at this dangerous sport, that he scarcely noticed the arrival of the new guests, until the clank of armed feet startled him. Glancing round, and observing the chivalric strangers, he arose to salute them. The fool stared at them with a lack-lustre gaze, and then shaking his shaggy red hair over his face, as if the matter in nowise concerned him, resumed his diversion with the dogs.

“Have I really the happiness, in this step of my painful pilgrimage, to encounter your worthiness, Messer Machiavelli of Florence?” exclaimed the canon, in a tone by no means so joyful as his words, but perceiving that subterfuge would be in vain, and that the ambassador had immediately recognised him.

“And if *he* pleases not your reverence, there is only another to send for,” said the jester, pointing downward with a very expressive gesture; then giggling vacantly, he stirred the embers with an iron pole kept for the purpose.

“Mean you the devil or Caesar Borgia, lad?” said the ambassador, smiling. “But do I behold the mirror of Parnassus, the quintessence of all learning and ingenuity, the Hercules of theology, in the person of Messer Bembo of Ferrara, lean canon of a fat cathedral?” he continued, in a highflown but somewhat ludicrous tone of compliment. “If I obtain no other reward for my journey across the Apennines, this is sufficient. But surely your party is not so much in favour at Rome, my dear Pietro, as to render a penitential journey thither of any particular advantage to your affairs?”

“I do not go to solicit a benefice, signor,” replied the canon rather testily. “Neither are faith and good works so altogether out of date as to make mine and these noble knights’ journey to Rome at this season so marvellous a miracle as to stare a man’s eyes out. But how chances it that the secretary of the magnificent signory is on his way to the capital of the enemy?”

“We want not the Medici home in the republic, and as all the rest of you are making your peace with the church, I see not why we should be so unchristian, not to say so mad, as to hold out alone,” replied the ambassador. “And this their magnificences have deputed a plain man to say to the Holy Father. But what are the latest news in the north? I warrant they scent as far down the wind at Ferrara as in the Val d’Arno.”

“All I know is, that I go to Rome for my sins, and on no embassy, unless I find occasion to apologise for our young prince’s unavoidable journey to France,” replied the canon.

“Nay, troth, he is better there than with t’other Don Alfonso, among the worms,” said the zany, staring with his glittering and yet vacant eyes on the Knight of St. John.

“Why if you bring your sins to Rome, where are all the pretty damsels we might expect to see in your train, master canon?” said the Florentine, laughing.

“It makes no matter how many; there is room for all the world at

Rome, and his wife, as well as paramour," continued the fool. "And then if Rome should sink with the weight of you, the bottomless pit would be long in filling, uncle—but, however, they would make room below, for they are very polite people there, as right they should be, being chiefly courtiers and great personages that have left their names in chronicles—such as your king, your great general, your wit, and your poet—folks that would be knocking their heads against the stars."

"But have you faithfully, brother Pietro and schoolfellow, no business in Rome but to do your soul good?" said the Florentine, with an acute gaze.

"And if I had, brother Niccolò, I have been your schoolfellow to more purpose than to let my secrets flutter to every wind," replied the canon, with affected cheerfulness. "Yet truly I am glad to see you safe from the lion's den, as I call Monsignor Borgia's camp. 'Tis a comfort to remark even one returning claw-print in the sand."

"And truly I am sorry to hear this news of your prince's running away from the gorgeous alliance offered him with the Cæsar's sister," replied the Florentine, with a vexed look. "The Orsini will have it all their own way, and if they conclude their marriage—woe to Tuscany."

"Yes, yes, let the bear try what sort of a wedge his paw will make," said the fool, laughing and chuckling. "Did his reverence the fox see aught of the Orsini claws in the sand, when he looked which way the beasts were going?"

"Now, by'r Lady, for a fool you have hit well in the bull's eye with a random bolt!" exclaimed Sir Reginald. "Do but hear, Signor Ambassador, what we have discovered, and judge if Cæsar's friends be any safer than his foes."

"Why, what history is this that hath a miserere before it?" said Messer Machiavelli, with an expression of sudden and strong interest; and even the fool leaned forward, but almost instantly resumed his careless attitude. "Now for a good tale, or let it not be about the Borgia; for our palates are high-seasoned with the tidings we hear of him at every step," said Machiavelli, with a glance at the jester, who jogged his head about, making the little silver bells ring a very gay and musical peal.

The canon was about to commence the narrative of their late singular adventure, when he was luckily spared the trouble of repeating it to two sets of listeners by the entrance of the prior and a long train of Carthusians, from their devotions. The monks all advanced in solemn silence, their heads sunk humbly on their breasts, the superior himself so worn with vigils and fasts, that his gaunt and powerful form seemed like that of a huge skeleton. He was the only one of the group who uttered any word of welcome to the new guests, yet he received them with a grave austerity which could scarcely be called so, and a general air of apathy which age and solitariness might well contract.

Machiavelli abruptly terminated the canon's oratorical request for hospitality by demanding the details of the circumstance relating to the Orsini to which he had alluded. Messer Bembo began a very eloquent narration, but Le Beaufort, wearied of his discursive progress, broke in, and told the story in as many words as the former intended to have used sentences. He concluded by requesting the prior to inform him if he knew any means by which the cavern might be searched, and the truth or falsehood of the information they had received ascertained.

"Did ye all dream this at once, or did one fool make many?" said the jester, with a strange laugh of derision. "What needs it, uncle Niccolò, to take me as a present to the pope, when these gentlemen are going of their own accord?"

"A civil tongue keeps a sound skin, fool," said the Florentine significantly.

The prior, whose brows had been gradually darkening, now observed, "All this is impossible, that you have been told—some wandering maniac's dream? No one among us has ever heard of any other means of access to the saint's cell but through the cataract, in which enterprise so many of the faithful have perished that it has long been prohibited."

"I have heard, when I was a novice," faltered out an ancient monk, bent nearly double with the weight of a hundred years,—"I have heard . . . what have I heard?—some way to the cave among the rocks . . . Father Ambrosio could have told . . . but he has been dead sixty years and odd, come Candlemas again. The winter was very cold, and he had long had a cough—poor man, he died very hard—Amien!—I mean, Saint Guidobald keep his soul."

"Perchance they have seen the Bad One in the likeness of that blessed saint, to put them all on breaking their necks," suggested the jester, with a look of great gravity and deliberation.

"The holy hermit, Saint Guidobald!—'tis not the first time that men have seen his likeness wandering about the cave where his canonized bones repose," said the centenarian. "But he appears only to men in mortal sin, to warn them of their approaching end."

"Nay, for he that appeared to us wore not the Carthusian habit, but that of learned Dominic," said Messer Beinbo, with a shudder. "You learn to speak and think very dismally, brother, among these great, sprawling, ghostly pine forests."

"We learn to die," said the prior, with melancholy austerity.

"Alas! it is an art which we all acquire at the first trial," replied the canon.

"What ye took to be white robes of a Dominican, were, in truth, the folds of his shroud in which they wrapped our saint ere the angels came," said the ancient monk, with the obstinate fidelity of age to its opinions.

"Then, perchance, Saint Guidobald is at last tired of his neglected grave, and would have his bones brought to the monastery, to be enshrined and work miracles like another," said the Florentine.

"Deem you so, signor?" returned the prior, obviously struck with a fancy which chimed in harmoniously with the dominant ideas of the age. "And truly, as to bandits—none have been seen or heard of since Don Remiro was podestà of Romagna, for they must all either hang or enlist under the Duke's banner."

"But we saw with our own eyes the carcasses of the Orsino's men, on the spot where was once Jacopo Savelli's castle!" exclaimed Le Beaufort. The prior looked at him somewhat incredulously, and then observed, "If it be so, let us wait till daylight, for else it were dangerous lest the robbers resist."

"To-night, to-night! not a single instant will I delay," said the Hospitaller, impetuously. "To-morrow may be too late: they may remove or slay him. Let every Christian man among you take a torch and follow me!"

“What say you, fool, is not this an enterprise for thee to meddle in?” said Messer Niccolò.

“Nay, I will look on and see fair play; strike away, boys, ye cannot hurt me,” returned the buffoon, with a listless yawn.

“If you are resolved, our brothers shall lend you such assistance as may be,” said the prior; “but you will find your undertaking is impossible.”

“Let us then to work, and I pledge my knighthood we will do nothing that is impossible, father,” said Le Beaufort, himself setting the example by snatching a blazing branch from the fire. Even the Carthusians awakened from their usual apathy, and set to work with eagerness to kindle torches, and the ambassador’s escort looked at him with the eyes of hounds in the leash.

“Yea, since all Christians are to be aiding, let your cutthroats loose, uncle,” said the fool; and it seemed they needed no farther permission, but riotously joined in the enterprise. All the conventuals, except such as were disabled by extreme age, also followed the knights to the yard where the English soldiers were engaged in stabbing their horses, leaving the ambassador and his fool nearly alone in the hall.

“Come, master, let us be mad with the rest; ‘tis not enough to be fools this weather,” said the jester, after pausing for some moments as if in thought, and seizing the ambassador’s long cloak, he danced fantastically after him down the hall, as if officiating as a train-bearer.

Messer Niccolò seemed to take little notice of his elvish attendant, until they had passed the outer gate of the monastery, and beheld the glare and smoke of the torches vanishing and appearing in the windings of the rocks which descended to the bed of the torrent. He then paused, and turning with a smile of unutterable meaning to the jester, and changing his tone to one of profound respect—“What says your grace?” he observed in a low voice. “Will this turn out aught but a sick man’s dream?”

“I shall begin to believe in miracles, Niccolò, an’ it do; I that deal in them!” replied the other, in a tone of sarcastic levity. “Migueloto seldom half does his work; he has but one vice which is not useful to me—he is avaricious, Niccolò, avaricious!—But he is a sponge which, when full, I may, perchance, take a fancy to squeeze into my treasury; for without money, Niccolò, without money we can do little good in this world. Let us take our seat on the bridge, and watch these fools tumble down the precipices. But where are my hounds?—Ho, Sylla and Marius!”

“They are gone with the rest; they scarcely know you in your fool’s garb, my lord,” said the Florentine.

“If I thought the fiend would not, I would sooner die in it than in a monk’s,” returned the jester; but he seemed scarcely pleased with the desertion of his dogs, and whistled and called them for some time in vain ere he appeared to think it was so. Meanwhile Messer Niccolò had quietly quitted the path followed by the torch-bearers, and turned into that which led to the bridge.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISCOVERY.

"Cosa non detta in prosa mai nè in rima."—ARIOSTO.

Thing never told before in prose nor rhyme.

Commanding a view of the whole scene of operations, the ambassador and his jester could scarcely have chosen a better point whence to contemplate them than the centre of the bridge, which spanned the river like an arch of darkness. The noise of the torrent made conversation difficult; but neither seemed much inclined to indulge in it, both watching with interest for the appearance of the explorers. All was as yet darkness below, for although the sky was perfectly clear and set with innumerable stars, its feeble shine could not penetrate those mighty depths.

"'Tis a grim height," said the jester, after a pause, during which he seemed to be calculating the possibilities of success in the enterprise. "And this were no ill place to be alone with one's enemy: 'tis so easy to slip accidentally. Why look you so stealthily at me, Niccolò? I know thou art my friend."

"Monsignor, I was but considering, that even with all the advantages of suddenness and treachery, such sports might be dangerous," replied the Florentine. "But Signor Paolo was your friend too; at least you embraced him and called him your brother."

"Why, so he meant to be," replied the jester calmly.

"I see not into the depths of this policy very clearly," continued the Florentine,—"at this time, when it is of so much consequence to your lordship to conciliate the Orsini and their faction, to destroy him on his way to Rome with proposals of peace?"

"I will destroy them all either by force or fraud, fair weapons both against their treachery and rebellion!" returned the jester fiercely. "Were it the sea, I would empty it drop by drop rather than sit down and fold my hands in despair. Moreover, can I prevent men that travel as they deem by stealth, without adequate attendance, from being murdered by banditti? Know you not, that he departed for Rome rather by my father's invitation than by my will? And shall I tamely lose the recompense of all my toils, because an old man grows timorous and full of fantasy?"

"Indeed, if Donna Lucrezia should wed an Orsino, the barons must be restored to their usurpations," returned the ambassador.

"And what were then my dukedom of Romagna? a trumpet sound full of bravery without substance!" said the jester, tossing his false hair impatiently back from his eyes.

"And where were then your kingdom of Italy?" continued the politic Florentine, in a low but very emphatic tone.

"You jest with me, Niccolò, but fate shall not!" replied the motley, with a fierce sparkle of his brilliant eyes, and clutching his delicate hand as if it already held the sceptre. "I would I could see again that withered old wizard of Padua, half madman as he was, who was wont to assist me

when, being a visionary school-boy at Pisa, I studied the magic art while our long-bearded masters imagined I was lost in the dust of Augustine and Bernard!"

"He did show you a vision, methinks, I have heard it said, in a mirror formed of one vast amethyst?" inquired Messer Machiavelli in a slightly mocking tone. "At least so it is vulgarly reported in Italy, and that the skilful greybeard was the devil himself. But now they appear! Look how their torches light up the waters like a hot stream of hell!"

"Didst thou gofthither to school, that thou rememberest it as clearly as Dante, Niccolò?" replied the motley. "Yea, and with as yearning a melancholy as a Swiss clown the green valleys and snow-diademed hills of his land! But what do the peasants prattle that the wizard showed to me by his felonious art?"

"A skeleton in a royal crown and mantle, offering to your kneeling form his sceptre," returned the ambassador.

"It is false, and I will bake in a furnace him who says so!" exclaimed the motley with fierce vivacity. "It was a shadow wearing the imperial crown and mantle of Charlemagne, as we see his effigies in the chronicle books, offering me his sceptre and sword twisted together in the likeness of a serpent."

"Your grace has read the lesson then well!" replied Machiavelli.

"And I know thou thinkest that thy master has learned thee all his tricks, being his favourite pupil, as the ancient boxer taught his," said the jester, with a peculiar smile. "Yet beware that, like him, he has not reserved one which may foil thee at last. Yet when I have made my crown something more than this fool's babbie which I wear, Niccolò, my subtle Niccolò—when I am Cæsar indeed, what shalt thou not be to me?"

"Thy Brutus!" replied the Florentine, with a peculiar flashing glance at his companion.

"My Sejanus, thou meanest rather, dear Niccolò," said the motley, with a smile in which lurked a dark and deep underthought, "but thou art ever ill at comparisons."

Machiavelli made no reply, beyond raising his furred cap half ironically, as if accepting the office, and reverted his eye to the spectacle below, keeping, however, a sidelong note of his companion's movements. The great mass of light, now brought to bear, revealed a grandly picturesque and singular scene. Along the bed of the stream, leaping from rock to rock in the rapid waters, appeared the knights and men-at-arms, and the Carthusians with their shaggy beards, all waving their torches, shouting to each other, and peering among the rocks forming the bosom of the gulf which received the torrent in its tempestuous overflow. Under this illumination the waves flew and eddied in wide streams of silver, and the cascade sparkled in infinite showers of diamonds.

But it seemed that the search led to no result, and the jester laughed aloud, when, gathering into such groups as the rocks permitted, it was even apparent to those above that they were engaged in despairing consultation. But while gazing thus, both the ambassador and his attendant started at a play of crimson light from the mouth of the cave before them. It vanished instantly; but was evidently noticed by the throng below, for they raised a shout which rang above the confused roar of the torrent.

"There is murder, surely, in yonder cave, that will out," said the Flo-

rentine with a slight shudder, and an acute glance at his companion.

"Murder hath no skill at kindling fires, to guide men to his haunts, that ever I heard," replied the jester, coldly. "However it be, they must needs retire, and have their labour for their pains."

"Yet wherefore are the knights stripping off their armour?—what can be meant?" returned the ambassador. "See you, the grim English squire is taking his lord's cuishes, and the canon is wringing his hands; what has he done with his torch?"

"Let it drop in the waves—I saw it go hissing down the current," replied the motley. "But where are the hounds?—I do fear their instinct more than these men's reason."

"Now, by St. Julian! the madmen intend to climb yon slippery precipices!" exclaimed Machiavelli. "See you, sir?—they take opposite sides of the ~~cata~~act... well leaped, fool of the sun!—he is a whole rock above his compeer. Hark! how he laughs and waves his hand in triumph!—San Zanobi, it cannot be so difficult as we imagine hence to climb those rocks!—See how contentiously they keep pace with each other! All the fiends! they mount as if they had scaling ladders."

"No, no,—ha, ha!—look, yonder fellow slips—slides—the holy knight!—he will be dashed to pieces—well, what is that to thee or me, Niccolò?—ha, he has caught by yonder drooping water-larch!—he is safe now," ejaculated the motley, watching the hazardous descent of the Hospitalier, whose feet had slipped among the precipices, and who only saved himself from falling the whole height which he had ascended, by clutching at a dwarf pine which grew out of a cleft in the precipices. As it was, only with extreme difficulty and at imminent hazard of being engulfed beneath the masses of water, did he gradually regain the bed of the river.

"Where is the English savage now?" exclaimed the motley, after watching with breathless attention the perilous descent.

"He is lost in the cloudy foam!—there, there!—see you him not, like a sea-gull in a storm?" returned Messer Niccolò.

"Would the other were where he stands!—I like his face the worse of the two", said the jester. "And truly he intends to follow, finding that destruction could not meet him on the other side!—but he is not so lithe of limb!—he has slipped three times! Now, by the fisherman's keys! the English madman stands upon the rock before us—drenched and drowned as a rat; and yet with but a leap to place him in the cavern's mouth, or in the ravine below! By heaven, his glorious courage makes me wish him success, though it be to save one of that detested brood!"

"The rock trembles beneath his feet; he means to leap!—Sir knight! 'tis madness—return!" shouted Messer Niccolò.

"Let us not grieve too much; he will leave inheritors, no doubt," said the jester, relapsing into his usual tone. "But look you—he dares not—he hesitates—he dares not!—nor any man in his senses; the mere weight of the water would beat him down."

It seemed as if those below also perceived the desperate position and design of Le Beaufort. The Carthusians set up a confused misere; the Hospitalier, the canon, and all the men-at-arms joined in wild shouts to him not to attempt the imminently dangerous leap before him. They saw him wave his hand exultingly, as if he discerned some advantage which they could not; below—and he leaped!

The Florentine closed his eyes with a shudder, but opened them at an exclamation from his companion, not of horror but of extreme surprise.

The mysterious light again arose, and by its glare the figure of the knight appeared as if within a wall of water formed by the curve which the cataract made in pouring over the upper rocks.

“He will be murdered doubtless the moment he enters; some will be there to do the honours of the cave, if one may judge by yonder light,” said the motley, hurriedly.

The figure of the knight disappeared.

There was another pause of profound and aghast silence, and then the Hospitaller was observed rushing rather than climbing up the rocks, followed by the English soldiers. But the latter, embarrassed with their armour, could make but little progress, although animated by the most resolute desperation at the disappearance of their young leader. Anon the Hospitaller reached the projection from which his brother-in-arms had leaped, which was separated only by a chasm of roaring water from the marble buttress which broke the torrent into its first fall.

“What ails him?—dares he not follow?” said Machiavelli, breathlessly. “And now, look you, he is bending forward as if listening to some one speaking within the cavern!”

“Perchance 'tis the knight yelling for aid!” said he of the motley, leaning forward, as if he too would endeavour to catch the sound. “And now the priest hath got the better of the soldier in him! mark, how like a man pursued by wolves he is hurrying down the precipices as if tempting fate to pitch him headlong into death.”

“He has joined them—tells a breathless tale—and see you they are all rushing to the rocks on your side!” said the Florentine, whose companion was seated a little further on the bridge towards the shore opposite to the convent. At this instant the deep bay of bloodhounds discovering a scent was heard.

“What has happened?” exclaimed the motley, hurriedly, and gazing intently below. Men-at-arms and monks seemed alike rushing in delirious excitement over the shallow river, and vanishing rapidly one after the other in a dark fissure of the rocks.

“My life on it, they have discovered the saint's road to his hermitage!” exclaimed Machiavelli.

“Migueloto, if thou hast deceived me!” muttered the jester, springing up like a startled tiger, and leaping with the agility of the same animal over the Florentine, who still lay on the bridge, he hurried down the rocks. Messer Niccolò followed more leisurely, but the jester continued to hasten along, striding with such rapidity that on reaching the shore he nearly overthrew Messer Bembo, who was wringing his wet clothes and distractedly chaunting a hymn of thanksgiving.

“What is discovered? what hath happened?” exclaimed the Florentine. Messer Bembo could merely point to the opposite rocks, and then he laughed hysterically, wiping the tears from his eyes at the same time.

The nimble jester waited not to learn what might be the precise cause of this excitement. He vaulted from stone to stone across the river, and reached a yawning fissure in the rocks up which the glare of light, the distant shouts, and the continued howl of the hounds, convinced him that there was a way discovered. This passage in the rock had probably existed ever since the earthquake which had reft a way for the torrent itself, and ascended in a frightful zigzag, sometimes completely closed in by a kind of natural arch of huge marble blocks, at others cloven to a vast height so as to admit a pale streak of light. After winding as it seemed

for a great way through the dark entrails of the mountain, the passage terminated in the cavern below the torrent.

A singular spectacle awaited the gaze of the eager jester. The cavern was of great extent, composed of enormous masses of rock tossed together in chaotic confusion, and glittering all over in the blaze of the innumerable torches as if with serpents of coloured light, so singularly brilliant and twisted were the stalactites and petrifications which clustered on it. One rock indeed there was in which a strong effort of the imagination might shape some resemblance to a crucifixion. Fastened to this by an iron rivet, a chain, and a belt round his waist, lay the figure of a man, palpitating and struggling like a fallen horse, while the two knights, the Carthusians, and the men-at-arms, in a delirium of excitement, were endeavouring to break the massive links with blows, with their teeth, with exertions of main strength! Some embers of dry drift wood still burned near the prisoner, and had probably been the means by which he kindled the flames which had encouraged his deliverers to his aid; and but just in time, to judge by the cadaverous paleness of his features. The two hounds, which had evidently been beaten from their scent, stood licking their jaws and howling at a distance.

CHAPTER VII.

“A net in th’ one hand, and a rusty blade
 In th’ other was: this Mischiefe, that Mishap;
 With th’ one his foes he threatened to invade,
 With th’ other he his friends meant to enwrap,
 For whom he could not kill he practised to entrap.”—SPENSER.

Messer Niccolò followed in the steps of his companion at a more leisurely and careful pace; but such was the strength of the chain which bound the unlucky Orsino to its rock, that the rescuers had not succeeded in severing its links when he too arrived. It was of the kind used in fastening up in their stalls the mighty animals intended for the bull fights—a pastime which the Spaniards had introduced with themselves into Italy.

The Florentine took a leisurely survey of the whole scene, and of the person of the prisoner, which indeed was not unworthy of notice, for it presentend many of the finer characteristics of the Italian race, deteriorated indeed from the manliness and vigour of the Latin, but retaining much of the symmetry and grace befitting the boasted descendants of Venus. The Orsino was a man in the prime of his age, and possessed a frame rather remarkable for elegance and proportion than for power, yet which was probably of much greater strength than might at first have been concluded, from the perfect harmony and adjustment of the parts. The features were strongly, but at the same time finely delineated, traces of ardent passions visible in their rapid workings, and ever-restless variety of light and shade; which yet, at pleasure, could sink into a marble repose, that mocked the scrutiny of the observer. The complexion, too, might be compared to that which marble takes when long exposed to the rays of a southern sun, that golden paleness of hue which we rarely or never behold in the north, now deepened to swarthiness by

the dark sweat which bathed the visage of the exhausted captive. His long raven-blue hair heightened the cadaverous tint which suffering and dread had bestowed, and over which his sunken eyes, flashing with delirious excitement, diffused a strange light. His whole frame was indeed in agitation, the muscles throbbing, the palpitations of the heart visible through the mantle of flock cloth which he wore, his general costume being that of a Lombard merchant, which he had probably assumed as a disguise for his real quality. Surcharged with the electric fluid of the passions as was the nature of the Italian of the sixteenth century, still he had nothing of the mercurial vivacity of the Frenchman in him. His vehemence vented itself in thunder storms occasionally, but for the most part smouldered under a calm aspect, differing equally from the pompous gravity of the Spaniard, and which was not melancholy, and yet resembled it as twilight resembles moonlight. It was in this age that the Italians achieved that character throughout Europe which induced Shakspeare to make Italy the scene of some of his most vigorous and terrible creations, for there the passions of humanity seemed to have reached their hottest glow; the human intellect to have attained its subtlest polish—there the sun-struck passion of Romeo, and the refined fiendishness of Iago, were natural productions of an atmosphere so fraught with good and evil, with horror and beauty, treachery and cruelty so remorseless, love so absorbing as to resemble madness, and which only the delirious splendour of the imagination of that age, excited by the strange convulsions and revolutions which befell it, could have reflected into such terrible and yet magnificent distortions.

So much were the actors in the scene absorbed, that no one noticed the entrance even of so dignified a personage as the Florentine ambassador, except the jester, who had himself halted under the black natural archway which the piled rocks formed opening into the cavern.

“They have saved him indeed, the deadliest snake of the whole brood!” muttered the jester, half to himself, half to Messer Niccolò. “I will attempt no enterprise again on this day of the moon, for on it the blindest chance has foiled all wisdom and foresight! Yet stay! look how his tongue has swollen too big for his jaws—water would refresh him. Me-thinks I will bear him some; ‘twere a charity.”

“And lest the cold wave should chill, you will season it with some eastern powder, which warms the stomach suddenly?” returned Messer Niccolò, with an inquiring glance; adding, in a somewhat deprecative tone, “But I see not any good policy in that—it is one of my maxims, that a prince who intends to crush his enemies, should not attempt to do it in many blows, but in one which shall concentrate the strength of many, for else he runs much risk of exciting a resistance which may baffle him. Never injure but where you destroy, or you but sow the dragon’s teeth for your own destruction; therefore, until you can extirpate the whole Orsini family, I would not have you provoke them by the destruction of one of its greatest members, in whom its life-blood flows—its heir—for you can scarcely hope so sudden a catastrophe should hap without suspicion.”

“It is another of your maxims, Niccolò, that whoever would keep a newly-acquired state, must root out the whole race of the expelled prince,” replied the motley, musingly. “My power is only that of which I have deprived the fencatoryes of the Holy See.”

“Without doubt, you are the destined instrument to exterminate the petty tyrants of Italy, and once more to restore her unity,” replied the

politician. "It is also true that Paolo Orsino is one of the most powerful—nay, since the Colonnas were stripped naked—the most powerful of the church's rebels; still, I do not think the time is seasonable at this moment for his destruction."

"Niccolò, thou hast a better brain to devise, than heart to execute," replied the jester, somewhat contemptuously smiling. "But thou art ever mine oracle; and moreover, there is something whispers me that, like all the other mischances of my life, even this is working to my good. I may yet need Paolo to play against the proud coxcomb of Ferrara. What doth this Bembo with his sharp nose cutting the air of Umbria?"

"I would I could assure myself on that thesis, sir," returned the politician.

"I will not give the Orsino to drink then—now; moreover, I must learn who hath betrayed me thus by suffering him to live to need a draught at my hands, or the tickling in his ribs of a sprinkle of mercy!" continued the motley. "But I much doubt whether Signor Paolo, who has cause to know me, who has met me in battle, where men's looks strike into each other's souls, may not recognise me even in this disguise. Anon, and I shall find it as difficult to hide me as the sun, were he to play at bo-peep with the world."

"Nay, sir; in this disguise, with those fiery red locks, that bepatched visage, those strange eyes, who could recognise the great duke of Romagna? And considering how little some do love you, who could suspect such folly in the subtlest spirit of the age, as to believe he would trust himself to its protection?" said Messer Niccolò.

"Nay, good lad, not altogether; these fellows of mine will not turn their backs on double their number," replied the jester, rather hastily, as if he liked not the covert sneer. But, at this moment, a shout of joy interrupted the dialogue. One of the massive links of the chain had yielded to a prodigious blow which Sir Reginald struck it with a sharp fragment of rock, and the prisoner sprang up, at liberty. His next movement was to throw himself on his knees before the crucifixion, and solemnly to vow the erection of a chapel to Saint Guidobald, as near as possible to the scene of his miraculous deliverance. Then, rising, he embraced his deliverers in turn, with the most vehement protestations of eternal gratitude.

"My castles, lands, revenues, my heart and soul, and those of my whole race, are at your devotion, noblest knights!" he exclaimed. "The life which you have preserved is yours, and there is nothing I call mine, excepting the love I bear my beautiful mistress, which I would not gladly part withal to lighten me of the vast burden of gratitude which will else overwhelm my soul."

"We shall not ask you to surrender that sole reservation among your treasures, my lord, more especially as it seems only a talisman of mishaps," replied the Hospitaller, with a sarcastic smile. "But your thanks are more truly owed to the compassionate Dominican monk who guided us hither, than to us, to whom it was merely an exercise and a sport."

"A Dominican!" exclaimed the young baron, with an appearance of much surprise. "Surely, then, 'tis my guardian angel, sent in that disguise by my sweet patroness, Our Lady of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, to whom I also vow threescore torches of Turkish ambergris at Candlemas."

“Of Santa Maria Maggiore!” muttered the jester. “Ay, forsooth, because Our Lady’s portrait there so nearly resembles his beautiful mistress.”

“It had like, for I do hear that incomparable piece of Leonardo’s was painted from your beauteous mother, Madame Vanozza,” said Messer Niccolò, in a whisper to his companion, whose whole frame vibrated as if struck with some jarring association.

“Do you notice,—did you ever notice, my best Niccolò, how little I resemble either the Virgin of Santa Maria Maggiore, my mother, or the Vicar of Christ, my father?” he said, in an eager and hurried tone. “Well! I have heard it often whispered, (I am half convinced of the truth of it myself,) that I was exchanged at nurse; for, after all, the pope fears much more than he loves me, and I never had much brotherly affection for my kin, nor they for me, by Saint Peter’s rock! and his holiness as good as disowned me when he made me a cardinal. I think some day to question the hag who nursed me; ay, and if need be, in a way that shall force the truth out, if it be anywhere in her withered old carcass!”

He spoke with a singular vehemence, and even fury, as if stirred with the remembrance of this imaginary wrong. Messer Niccolò looked at him with a keen and penetrating gaze; but he replied, as if not laying much stress on what was said, “Methinks it were no stroke of policy on your part, my lord, to prove this rumour fact, if rumour it be.”

“You are mistaken, Niccolò.—Niccolò, for once you are mistaken!” returned the jester, in a lower, but still excited key. “By heaven! I would rather be acknowledged, at this moment, the lawful heir of my old foster-father Schiavone’s poverty, than remain the monstrous bastard of a priest!”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed Machiavelli, gazing incredulously at the speaker, and subjoining in thought, “Can remorse or shame, in reality, enter this fiendish bosom?” But an idea, suggested by the dreadful reports afloat in Italy, occurred to him, and he continued, with a subtle smile, “But you will not tempt or force your old foster-mother to tell the truth until you are established in Italy as yourself, and not as a Borgia, monsignor?”

“Oh, thou brother of my soul! our thoughts are ever twins,” replied the jester, in a tone of some displeasure, as if vexed that he had so far revealed his secret mind. “Therefore I can hide nothing from thee, were I even willing. But, come, let us keep the start of the mob, for I see they mean to lead their precious prize once more into the free air.”

After the first enthusiastic outburst of joy and feeling, the Orsino had, it appeared, become again exhausted, and was now supported staggeringly towards the exit by some of his numerous deliverers. The ambassador and his companion immediately hastened on before, unwilling to mingle in the confusion of the returning multitude.

As they approached the end of the fissure on the river, the voice of the canon was audible, calling in an excited tone, but not venturing to explore what had happened *in propriâ personâ*. The jester amused himself with answering in a variety of ghostly and discordant cries, which were multiplied and made hoarse by the echoes of the rocks; the due effect of which appeared, when, emerging on the river, they found that the canon had disappeared.

“Methought he dared not encounter the substance of those sounds!—few priests dare, even of those which themselves make,” said the jester,

laughing sardonically. “But I can in nowise fathom this matter of the Dominican. It was my father himself who invited the Orsino to Rome, hard against my will, until I bethought me of the dangers that beset travellers in these times, and that with Paolo’s the brains of the confederacy were knocked out. But how could his sanctity have such certain notice of my designs?”

“You are not, then, my lord, of Signor Paolo’s opinion, that heaven itself took so strong an interest in his affairs as to send one of the blessed to his deliverance?” said Machiavelli.

“If the heavens troubled themselves much about what is done on earth, methinks the world’s business would be nigh bankruptcy,” returned the jester. “But I deem, if all the saints in heaven were as contentious after an errand as the porters at St. John Lateran’s gate, there is ne’er a prince nor lord in Italy, at this present naming, who is not too affectionately and zealously served by the devil to need their aid.”

“Then, perchance, my Lord Paolo’s good devil hath stood his friend on this occasion,” said the Florentine, gravely. “Mayhap he prayed so earnestly in his tribulation, that it was thought expedient to leave him to be plucked in a time of less grace than this of the jubilee, when heaven showers indulgences with both hands as liberally as girls throw the yellow asphodels at one another in the Campagna, in April.”

“What if it be rather the work of my bad devil,—for I have one, that thwarts and ravels all my plans!” exclaimed the motley, with passionate and sudden vehemence.

“Do I live to hear my Cæsar say that of a man above ground?” said Messer Niccolò, with great curiosity.

“No, Niccolò, thou dost not—thou dost not!” returned the motley, hurriedly; and Machiavelli remarked that his features became of an un-earthly paleness.

“My lord, you would not say, that—” began the Florentine, when his companion interrupted him—

“Thou dost not believe in ghosts, Niccolò, dost thou—at all?” he said in a calmer tone, “whether in the flesh, or out of it; or else thou dost oft jest daringly! But wouldest thou disbelieve in thine own eyes?”

“There is nought that I do less believe in; the cores of things, and not the rinds for me, my lord,” replied the politician. “Had I believed mine eyes, I should have written word to my serene lords that your grace was making a b’other of the Medici’s nephew, this Orsino, and that consequently they should keep our drawbridges up in Florence as expecting an enemy.”

“The confederates strain at nothing else; neither of us can trust the other; so that for either party to keep his forces we can only unite against some third;—but thou hast my word for it—the Venetians shall feel the earthquake first, if I am he who loosens, it,” said the jester. “But what saidst thou concerning the rinds of things? Is it not Lucretius who fancies spirits represent the forms of their once bodies as the flimsy onion peel its substance when stripped from it? But, being so, a ghost should preserve the exact appearance in which its carcass disappeared! They are not like players, that can shift their garbs at pleasure behind the black curtain, ha? What say you?”

“Pray you, my lord, explain yourself more clearly to a dull apprehension,” returned Messer Niccolò, with an eye, however, which in its piercing earnestness gave no evidence of intellectual hebetude.

"I would say, for example," observed the motley, in a tone of dark rumination, "I speak as the thought flashes over my mind—that if my sometime brother, the Duke of Candia, for instance, would obligingly gratify my father, who whines so often over the fate of his firstborn, that was forsooth so beautiful and good that people blessed him as he went along merely for his fair looks, and all the women doated on him!—I say, if Francesco's ghost should take a fancy to present itself some night to—to Alexander VI., what form and what garb deem you he were likely to appear in?"

"To his father?" replied Ser Machiavelli, without daring to trust his eyes to meet the fiery gaze which he felt was fixed upon him. "Oh, fathers are a strange people! Certainly not with all those dagger-wounds upon him, and the slime of the Tiber streaming from his long golden curls, which I have heard his holiness fondly call his rays. But, if it consulted the parental taste, most likely it would appear as the blooming young Antinous he seemed among all the youth of Rome that day he was made gonfalonier of the church, when he wore the white velvet habit trimmed with rubies, and rode the snowy charger bit with silver and pearls."

"I will shoe my horses with silver, but the Romans shall forget that pageantry!" returned the motley, vehemently. "But, for myself, I shall not very soon; for I remember, when I rode behind him on my silly mule, perked up in my violet cardinal robes, his horse bespattered me all over with mud, as he reined it suddenly up to salute his sister, Donna Lucrezia!—for I can scarce call her mine. I was in such a passion that I nigh choked in silence! I thought it was done with the purpose to affront me; for you should have heard how the rabble laughed."

"I did hear; for they laughed so loud that we heard it at Florence," returned Messer Niccolò playfully. "Then, when we took it up, the laugh went on to Mantua, and so to the king of France's court at Milan,—where they laughed too, no doubt, for they hated you then."

"They hate me now! but I care not who hates, provided men serve my purpose; nay, it pleases me to see my haters fawn upon me. What is power, but to sway men against their wills?" replied the jester; and reverting to the strange topic which he had himself chosen, as if it amused him, he continued,—"Let us say, then, that Francesco would put on his state-robcs to visit his august sire; he would surely shift them to visit his murderer!"

"I should conjecture he would appear with the very look, garb, and gesture with which he died beneath the monster's blows!" returned Machiavelli, kindling out of his habitual tone of cynical indifference. "His countenance convulsed with horror, pain, and desperate entreaty; his nine wounds panting out the crimson blood of his youth, like young vipers gasping for food; his fair hair drenched and bedabbled; his beautiful face drained of its lovely colours, and whitening into stone! yea, with the very aspect of the sinless Abel, bleeding on his odoriferous sacrifice!"

"Lamented over by his wife—and sister, ha!" exclaimed the jester, with a wild and scornful laugh. "Well, Abel merited his fate, though not perchance at the hands of Cain, if divines now-a-days are right—but my poor brother! Alas, what had he done to anger any one, whose fiery temper was yet as manageable and full of all comely sweetesses as the highblooded steed of Arabia, so docile to the rein, so furious to the spur!"

"He was, indeed, a most excellent and well-conditioned youth; as promisingly laden with fair qualities as an almond-tree with blossoms," returned Ser Machiavelli. "Peace to his soul, if he had one! He has been long enough in purgatory to burn out that worst offence he had—a too lavish affection for that which Plato did *not* call the beautiful."

"But when we consider, too, that from his offence sprung his chastisement!" said the jester, with hypocritical suavity. "Some jealous husband, or revengeful lover, no doubt met him that fatal fourteenth of June."

"Or maddened father, or irritated brother!" said Machiavelli. "They told us in Florence that at the great feast which your mother gave to you on that day,—the next, and your grace (then cardinal) was to depart for Naples, to crown King Don Federigo,—a masked stranger frequently applied to see the duke, and at length had access, and delivered him a perfumed letter at table. Whereupon he soon after pleaded some indisposition, and withdrew; and your grace (having preparations to make for your journey) went with him."

"We parted on the steps of the Palazzo Sforza; 'tis all true enough," said the jester, calmly. "And he, in his merry way, would needs have me give him absolution, (being a priest,) for that he was wending to see the fairest lady in all the patrimony of St. Peter! I, as laughingly, alack! told him he must first do penance; and away went he, waving his hand, and singing in his gaiety, as it were in triumph. Perchance he meant, too, to have wished my sister Lucrezia good night, for he went towards the convent where she was staying until the divorce was pronounced which severed her from the Lord of Pesaro."

"And your grace never saw him again?" said Machiavelli, suddenly.

"Surely!—when we drew his corpse all streaming from the river, near Castel Sant'Angelo, and also when we buried him in state, in his armour and gauds as gonfalonier," replied the jester. "I was obliged to ordain all, for his father took no notice of anything, but bolted himself in his chamber, and starved for three days; and would have starved himself to death but for Lucrezia's prayers and tears, and getting very hungry. And oh, what vows of reformation did he make! but his holiness is like Vesuvius, ever either raging with fire, or silent in snow."

"Ay, it is so, my lord, but surely you are the Titan whose throes within cause the mountain to heave," said Ser Machiavelli; "yet continuing our confabulation of the secrets of Orcus, in what guise does your lordship imagine the spirit of your noble brother *would appear to his murderer?*"

"As a black shadow, without voice, visage, colour, or form," replied the jester, turning with so strange an expression to Messer Niccolò, that, but that he was a perfect diplomatist, he must have started. "Yet, lacking all these means of enforcing recognition, still would he be recognized! The murderer of the pope's darling can be no coward; he might not fear this presence; still would it irk him more than the direfullest form, shake his soul with its silence more than by the most terrible imprecations; until he shall defy, madden, rave, rush at it sword in hand, and wake and laugh, and gnash his teeth, and know that it is only a darkness, and yet that it is there, and will not away throughout time or eternity!"

"I marvel not you solace your vain revenge with such fearful hopes," said the Florentine; "since the murderers have so long eluded all search that 'tis past expectation they should ever be discovered, on earth at least. Alas! what feelings must be yours, my lord; you that were his brother,

that played with him in childhood, that spent your flourishing youth together engaged in all manly exercises and joyous sports, budding and branching like two fair cypresses planted by the same hand in the same hour."

"No; but like two acorns, one of which by the mere accident of the sun shoots up and dwarfs his brother," returned the jester, bitterly. "But let all that pass. I must find the bottom of this strange matter of the Dominican. Migueloto dared not have thus trifled with my orders. Have I not heard thee say, Niccolò, that my lieutenant, Don Remiro, has received some kind of obligation from the sacred chamber lately without my connivance?"

"His holiness admired the rigidness of his justice so much, that he gave him a general indulgence for all the cruelties he has committed in his office," said Ser Machiavelli. "Moreover, his wife is some kindred to the Colonnas."

"How came I ever to forget that?" observed the jester, musingly.

"Nay, my lord, you needed a man of a nature so relentless in right as Don Remiro's," said the Florentine. "And has he not justified your confidence by routing out nearly all the robber-holes in Romagna, so that the peasants even sow corn as far as Spoleto?"

"And what is more, they reap it," said the motley. "When I made Don Remiro podestà; I told him that I would not have a rogue left in all Italy, if I could prevent it, but myself. Yet they tell me, he is as little loved as the fierce iron with which we have our wounds seared up; and if he has stood in the way of my will in this matter, I know the people would clap hands to see him come out on one of his own streaming scaffolds."

"Then, I approve the sending of him forth," said the ambassador, jocosely. "No man has a right to govern another, even to his advantage, against his will. But where in the name of marvels have we wandered?"

"Whither I have been leading all along, for I never forget business in pleasure, Niccolò," replied the jester. "I would have you send me my mute, Zeid, and this gigantic pine is a landmark by which you may guide him to my biding-place."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLACK PENITENT.

"I have heard how desperate wretches, like myself,
Have wandered out at this dead time of night,
And met the foe of mankind in his walks."—OTWAY.

"Nay, my lord, you will surely feel very melancholy to be left alone in this dismal gorge, (especially after our ghostly conversation," said the Florentine, looking up the mountainous valley towards the torrent which they had left at some distance in the rear.

"'Tis very sad indeed to think of it; but the Duke of Gandia is better in heaven, and we have more room on earth," said the jester, mockingly. "Hasten, my good Niccolò, and send this fellow to me, but let them not note his coming; and let him bring my hounds with him."

"They are here, my lord," said Ser Machiavelli, pointing to the dogs,

which, with dejected steps and drooping heads, had hitherto followed their master in silence.

"Poor things! they are not accustomed to be so cheated of their rewards," said the jester, compassionately patting the heads of the savage brutes. "But there is no time to be lost, Machiavelli; I will sit and watch the bear in the skies until I have given Zeid his orders, and then rejoin the bear in the convent."

"But again, my lord, I would have you think well ere you devise aught against this gentleman," said Messer Niccolò, slightly shivering, and then wrapping his cloak around him as if it were the night air which chilled his blood.

"Rest content; I mean only to despatch Zeid on a message," returned the motley, impatiently; and observing that he was chafed and out of temper, the Florentine bowed respectfully and withdrew. Retracing his steps with some trouble up the steep paths which led to the monastery, he could not refrain from pausing once on a projecting precipice whence he could easily distinguish the pine tree at whose root Cæsar Borgia had seated himself.

"Tyrant, murderer, fratricide!" he could not forbear from exclaiming aloud, as if to give the suppressed feelings of his soul vent. "But also destroyer of tyrants! be a king, that thou mayst make all form of royalty detestable, as thy sire is a priest, to make all forms of superstition terrible. Cement the shattered provinces of Italy in an ocean of blood, if it must be, but once more together. Live to make Italy *one*, thou shalt die to make it *free!*"

And, clutching the hilt of his dagger with a kind of convulsive gesture which was not unusual with him, the Italian republican of the sixteenth century strode on his way.

Before reaching the gate of the monastery, however, the personage of whom he was in search luckily presented himself. Excepting the ambassador himself, no one in the train beside this being knew the real rank of the jester; and there was no great stretch of confidence in his knowing it, for besides being an African Moor, and therefore scarcely at all acquainted with the language of Italy, he was one of the miserable victims of oriental cruelty and jealousy, and had formerly been a mute in a Turkish seraglio, his tongue being slit in a manner which rendered any attempt which he might make to speak an inarticulate babble. But discretion was a quality which the Borgia esteemed in his instruments, and this enforced silence made him acceptable to his European master, who raised him gradually to a post which obtained him in Rome the title of Il Strozzacatore, or the Strangler; but which in Cæsar's household ranked him as first runner to his grace. For the former office, although never ostensibly employed, and having apparently no instrument to perform his operations with ever about him, extraordinary stories were afloat as to his capabilities; for the latter, which answers in some respect to a modern king's messenger, except that the Moor always travelled on foot, and in straight lines, swimming rivers and crossing mountain and valley with equal facility, still more singular legends were believed as to his qualifications. Among others, it was said that he had frequently hunted the stag on foot, and had never failed to run down his prey without assistance either of hound or arrow.

The Strangler's appearance was such as might gratify expectation, considering him under either point of view. If a leopard stood upright

on its hind legs, with its paws abjectly dropped in front, it would have been the figure of the Strangler, and its huge, round, bestial, hairy visage, black and brindled, with the same wild-beast expression of eye, would have daguerreotyped his countenance. In fact, he had little more than a rough resemblance to the general attributes of humanity, and one or two shades of its feelings; among which the most abject respect and obedience to his terrible master might perhaps be reckoned.

The few simple words which the Moor understood, enabled him to comprehend Machiavelli's order, and he hastened down the ravine with such rapidity that the Florentine almost imagined that he had doubled himself up, and rolled down like a dry bush of furze. Crossing himself, notwithstanding all his scepticism, he gladly continued his route through the convent gates.

The Strangler, by whatever means he reached a footing in the ravine, speedily made his way to the appointed spot, indicated by a lofty pine, which was entirely bare to its summit, where it was singularly tufted. He found his lord with folded arms walking restlessly up and down, on a strip of green turf beneath it.

"Zeid, thou art weary : my good dog, I now wish I had not diverted myself with seeing thee chase the hare in the snow-hills above," he said, in a mild and somewhat cajoling manner. "But I know thou lovest me ! Did I not beg off thy life, when Sultan Zem slashed thee once in the neck, and had raised his scimitar for a second blow?"

The slave acquiesced with a slight snort, like that of a horse when it perceives danger.

"Then thou must be in Roneiglione to-night, wert thou twice as spent," continued Cæsar, changing his tone to one of command. "In the castle there thou wilt find the podestà of Romagna, Don Remiro d'Orco, awaiting my arrival. Take this ring as thy credential, and bid him on the very instant despatch Don Migueloto, with all the Spanish men-at-arms not necessary to keep the walls, to meet me as near as may be to this place to-morrow morning."

Zeid knelt, took the ring, and placed it on his head in token of obedience.

"Follow the course of the river to Xarni ; thou knowest the track thence," continued Cæsar ; and the runner made a spring as if to dart forward on his journey, when his lord with a rapid clutch detained him.

"Delay not on thy journey so long as a hunted stag to lap in a stream," he said ; and pointing to the moon, which shone serenely above, he continued—"In an hour yonder light will sink behind the hills ; and when its last rim has disappeared I shall loosen my hounds on your traces, so if you pause to sleep, you know by whom you will be overtaken."

The Moor again bowed reverentially, as if the supervision indicated was a very proper and usual one, shot away like an arrow from the bow, and was almost instantly out of sight.

As it seemed with the intention of faithfully keeping his promise, Cæsar remained on the spot which he had selected for the interview, pausing for some time in deep thought, and then resuming his restless pacing up and down, without noticing that the two hounds never failed to follow him, however short the trip and sudden the turn. And yet it was a scene and a night which might have diffused its calm even over that perturbed and terrible mind. The mountains towered around in a kind of transparent darkness, so bright were the Heavens above, and so soft the shadows

which the moonlight threw among their rugged sides and aerial pinnacles. The distant roar of the cataract rather harmonized with than disturbed the blessed silence : even the turbulent river was there calm and undertoned, as if it feared to disturb the sleep of the mountains and forests around.

But Cæsar's step rather increased in fretful rapidity, and his eyes shone with more impatient sparkles, as he occasionally glanced up at the moon. At last he became weary of this exercise, and leaning his back against the pine, with his face to the fair planet, he seemed to watch it as if its gaze could follow or hasten its imperceptible movement over the sky. Sylla and Marius seated themselves on each side of their master, and appeared as if engaged in the same occupation, for certainly their red glistening eyes were fixed on the ball of light above.

While apparently the hounds and their lord were absorbed in this survey, the two former uttered a low whine, stretched their noses to the wind, and began to tremble in a very strange and unusual manner. Cæsar, after a glance at the dogs, looked in the direction whence it was evident they apprehended some approach, expecting to behold either a wolf or wild boar, or some other of the savage denizens : yet, for some moments, even his vulture gaze could discern no object. But suddenly a black form about the height and breadth of a man, but with no distinct outline of one, appeared on the bank of the river, at some distance, looking towards the cataract.

Cæsar's visage grew for a moment stonily pale and fixed, and he clutched at the pine to support his tottering limbs ; but the next instant, either his self-possession returned, or his terror took the form of defiance. He sprang forward several steps and although he paused irresolutely, he shouted in an unwavering tone, “*Speak! who goes there?—Friend or foe to Duke of Romagna?*”

“*Hillo, echoes! hillo, ladies! play me none of your cheats to-night!*” a voice was heard gibbering in reply ; the mere sound of which restored Cæsar to himself. He continued to watch, but no longer with any alarm, the gradual approach of the dark traveller, who came along with singular slowness, as if he were a very aged man, and talking to himself all the way. But the fears of the hounds did not diminish : they crouched on the grass, and continued their low tremulous whine. The stranger approached without apparently noticing any of the group, and in any other age and country might indeed have been pronounced a terrific *objet*. He seemed to be a very old man, for his figure was much bowed, and his gait feeble, supporting himself with difficulty on a staff ; but his face and form were completely covered with a black mantle tied round the waist, and perforated with holes at which the eyes looked out, but which was else all of a piece. This was the garb of a Black Penitent, which was only enjoined to be worn on a pilgrimage by criminals of the greatest atrocity.

“*Good even, father!* whither wend you so late by night, and so lonely?” said the motley, in a cheerful tone, as if relieved from some secret apprehension.

“*Lonely!—when the owl and the wolf hoot and howl at every turning,*” replied the Penitent with a wild laugh.

“*Have I not heard that voice before?*” said Cæsar, musingly. “*Why, thou art come as if a wish could summon thee!* Art thou not mine ancient master in the great art, Dom Sabbat, of Padua, who put fine thoughts in my head by showing me my fortune in a mirror of magic stone, and who, when the Inquisition sought thy acquaintance, left books and cham-

bers in a blaze, and disappeared like the flame on pools where murdered men lie rotting?"

"Or like yonder tongues of fire on the hill-side?" returned the Penitent, extending an arm of singular length, terminated by a hand so fibrous, lean, and withered, that it resembled the branch of a fir-tree in winter, and pointing to the brow of a distant mountain which presented a brilliant phenomenon not unusual in those volcanic regions. The craggy side of the mountain seemed as if set at intervals with blazing torches thrust from the earth by demon hands, which appeared and disappeared in fantastic evolutions.

"But thou art he?" said Cæsar, after gazing with an instant's careless attention at the spectacle.

"I have been so for a long time," replied the Penitent, with a dark chuckling laugh.

"Yes, thou art old, and very old; and thou needest some comfort in these thy worn-out times," replied Cæsar, cajolingly. "I am not so poor and powerless to do my friends good turns as I was when we studied the cabala at Pisa together—and I love to encourage the sciences—therefore, my good Sabbat, if thou wilt come and sojourn with me, thou shalt have a tower in Santangelo, and practise thy forbidden art so nigh to the Inquisition, that thou canst spit at it from thy windows; and thou and I will make brazen heads that chatter, and devise antidotes, and study the plants that poison so prettily that 'tis a pleasure to die by them, and such like toys, which thou wert wont to love in the old time when I was thy so reverent and faithful pupil."

"Truly, your grace is no longer a younger brother," replied the Penitent, inclining himself forward as if to do homage to the accession of dignity in his pupil, but with a degree of mockery, "and I thank you for your noble offer; but it behoves men who have lived for fifteen hundred and odd years to think of dying;—and so they have compelled me to abjure the dark science, and have sent me to Rome to save my soul this jubilee time!"

"Fifteen hundred years!—thou jestest, or art mad, Dom Sabbat!" exclaimed the Borgia, somewhat startled.

"Oh, you know not how long Heaven can hate!" returned the Penitent with wild vehemence. "'Tis many a thousand years since the great bonfire was kindled; and he who spat in the face of the Son of God when he bore the cross up Calvary still wanders alone through all time!"

"Yet come with me: I know thou hast many noble secrets which the church herself permits us to learn," said Cæsar, soothingly. "Have I not seen thee raise the dead in the person of that imperial phantom who offered me his sceptre?"

"What would it pleasure thee or profit thee to trouble him again—besides shaking the towers of Aix-la-Chapelle, which are already so old and tottering, to raise him?" returned the Penitent.

"But if thou canst raise the dead, canst thou not also lay them?—Canst thou not bid them back to their tranquillity?—why should they blot sunshine with their dark presence?" exclaimed Cæsar, with an impatient and fierce glitter of the eye, and knitting his hand convulsively.

"That is the church's office—to exorcise, not mine!" returned the Black Penitent.

"Tut, tut, I have been a cardinal, and I know what priests can do," said Cæsar.

"And stand the dead too in thy light?" returned the Penitent, his strange eyes flaring through their holes like flame, if flame could glow with meaning, with diabolical, sarcastic, and at the same time insane thought.

"Thou art deaf at guessing riddles," said Cæsar, calmly. "It is not that I fear him—Ir!—but it wearies me when so oft in the midst of banquets and splendid feasts, I raise mine eyes and behold it standing before me. But do not deem I fear it—I despised him living—I despise him dead!—I tell thee, Dom Sabbat, when I first beheld it, at the instant when, as legate of the holy see, I put the crown on the head of King Don Federigo in Naples,—I did not even start."

"You speak some feverish fancy, my son; the strongest of your recollections haunts you, which only a stronger can efface, replied the Penitent, with a short discordant laugh. "But you forget, boy, to slip the hounds, and the moon is far behind Monte Sonoma."

"Heard you my threat to Zeid?" said Cæsar, with a slight shudder. "But I never threaten in vain, or I should be no better served than my hot sire himself; so whoop, hounds—after him, after him!"

He stirred the hounds with his foot, which still lay couching and panting on the grass, as if the presence of the stranger infused terror even into their savage natures. They whined, but would not move.

"There is surely a spell about me—but I am going," observed the Penitent, with his dark inward laugh.

"It is late; rest with me to-night in the Carthusian monastery above," said Cæsar eagerly; but the Penitent shook his head.

"I am forbidden to rest under any roof—out of Rome—much more to profane consecrated stone and mortar with my presence," he said, in a derisive and yet profoundly gloomy tone.

"Then I will spend the night in converse with thee under this mightiest roof above!" replied Cæsar.

"Nay, for I may not pause, and thou art needed with the company. Dost thou not feel thy cheek sear, for they are talking of thee?" said the Penitent, taking his staff as if to resume his journey.

"But promise me at least that thou wilt visit me in Rome," said Cæsar, very eagerly. "Thou hast but to present thyself at Santangelo, with a token from me to Donna Fiamma, who honours science equally, and she will see thee lodged and attended more zealously than ever Merlin in King Arthur's court."

"Give me thy token; I have heard of the lady, and of her nourishing love for the art," replied the sage, after a moment's pause.

"I must give thee then my poison-emerald, which reddens when my drink is dangerous; for I have sent my signet on another errand," said Cæsar, slowly and somewhat reluctantly taking a small leaden box, about the shape and size of dice, from a hollow in the stick of his fool's bauble, which, nevertheless, he handed over to the Penitent. "And when we meet again, Dom Sabbat, as thou canst no longer fear I should betray thee, either for lack of faith or wit, let me at last see thy face, which thou keepest ever so strangely masked and muzzled."

"Trust none, fear none," replied the Penitent, gloomily. "But hark! they are calling thee, or what voices are those which make the rocks ring?"

"Farewell, then, till we meet in Santangelo," said Cæsar; and he stepped forward to offer his hand in parting. But the stranger contented himself with a fantastic salute, by waving his withered hands in the air at

an extraordinary height, and hastening forward, almost instantly disappeared behind some projecting rocks.

Indistinct voices were now audible in the distance, calling “Zany, Zany,” as if the ambassador had taken alarm at the long absence of his jester. The hounds sprang up with their wonted alacrity the moment the adept in the unholy science had disappeared; and remarking it, Cæsar endeavoured, but in vain, to get the dogs to follow even the shortest distance on his trace. They howled fearfully, but would not stir, until he took them back to the pine tree where the Strangler had left him, whose scent they took eagerly, and followed with emulous swiftness. After listening till the light patter of their delicate feet was inaudible in distance, even to the fine organs of the Borgia, he turned and retraced his way to the Carthusian monastery.

CHAPTER IX.

“O voi ch’ avete gli intelletti sani,
Mirate la dottrina che s’ascende
Sotto i vellame degli versi strani.”—DANTE.

“O ye of subtle intellect, mark the doctrine hidden under the veil of these strange words.”

Returning up the rocks, and imitating as he went very accurately the cries of a screech-owl, the jester guided Messer Niccolò, and two or three soldiers who were in search of him with torches, until they met. The Florentine affected to rate his fool severely for the trouble his lingering had occasioned; to which he replied, that he had been trying to get the great gold crown which hung in the sky, and whistled vacantly, until the soldiers, who turned back at a signal from Messer Niccolò, were at a distance.

“It is possible, after all, my lord, that the Dominican was sent by your father; for I hear that he met and warned Signor Paolo to turn back long ere he fell into his danger,” said the Florentine.

“How should that be?—Banditti were not likely to make a confidant of our holy father,” returned the jester, drily. “But in truth, I know not what to think of the matter. My sister’s confessor is a Dominican.”

“The famous father, Bruno Lanfranchi, the disciple of Savonarola?” replied Ser Machiavelli. “But wherefore should your sister—”

“Ay, the insolent monk, whose revilings should long since have obtained for him the justice of having his tongue plucked out by the root, but for Lucrezia’s folly!” replied the motley, fiercely. “They control me in all things now—but my time will come.”

As he spoke they entered the monastery, and made their way to the great hall, in which they found the Orsino and his rescuers engaged in discussing the recent event, and such viands as the austere rules of the order permitted them to furnish. In addition, the canon had found in some part of his baggage several skins of excellent wine, some draughts of which had evidently much revved the late prisoner.

“I was saying, Messer Niccolò,” he observed, as the ambassador took his seat, while the fool threw himself carelessly into his old place on the straw heaped round the fire, “that I do grievously misdoubt—that I know

not by what means the banditti could have learned my intentions to cross the mountains with the slight escort whom they murdered when they captured me?"

"If only Alexander knew of your intentions, and not his detested son! Still the inference needs no cart-horse to draw, signor," said the Hospitaller; and there was a moment's general but most emphatic silence.

"Nay, sir knight, though you be my noble and most gallant deliverer, I pray you speak not thus!" said the Orsino, his countenance becoming of a livid paleness. "Lucrezia is as good as she is beautiful, and 'tis blasphemy even in madness to dream such hideous phantoms."

"You are fortunate in thinking so, my lord," said the knight, very coldly.

"Her charities are boundless! There is not a beggar on this side Po but has tasted of them," continued the young baron.

"They had need be, to cover such sins, uncle Niccolò," said thee fool, with a vacant look, as if of inquiry, at the Florentine.

"Beware that these soldiers hear not our prattle, Lord Paolo; they serve the duke," said Ser Machiavelli, with real uneasiness.

"Nay, the worst of my English is a match for the best of yon mixed scum!" said Le Beaufort, scornfully. "And the thieves are mostly asleep in their litters, and truly, being chiefly savages, they can understand but little of what we speak at this distance."

"Sooner than wed this lady, were she Dame Venus herself," exclaimed Le Beaufort, who had been musing for some minutes, a very unwont practice with him, "I would wed the fiend's eldest daughter, with damnation for her dowry!"

"Were she even that, and death the high priest who should solemnize our bridalty, I would to my grave with rapture, if only her beauty shared it with me," returned the passionate Italian.

"She must needs be beautiful!" said the canon, with a glance at the Hospitaller.

"Perchance the sire and son *then* made signs to each other in this affair of your betrayal, Signor Orsino?" said the unmoved chevalier.

"For in the rose there was a wasp
Which stung his nose to smell—to smell,
And then he blamed the rose—the rose—
And flung it in—a well,

improvisated the jester, with a sarcastic and yet vacant expression, as if he lost sight as he went on of his own meaning.

"No, no, sir knight!—indeed such treachery were impossible!" exclaimed Messer Bembo.

"But hath *he* been thrusting his hand in among the thorns too, that he complains so bitterly?" continued the zany, gazing still more earnestly on the priestly knight; but suddenly turning a look of stony stupidity to the Orsino, who for the first time was regarding him with attention.

"Light of Heaven! what is impossible to the Borgias?" exclaimed the Hospitaller, without heeding the canon's deprecating look. "For what cause do men report that the unfortunate Duke of Gandia was murdered?"

"There is a Roland for an Oliver—Cæsar is Duke of Romagna," said Le Beaufort, laughing, but not with his usual cheer.

"Rome was founded by a fratricide; why, uncle, 'tis the very man to

restore her?" said the jester, with a sudden sparkling of his diamond eyes as he glanced at Messer Niccolò.

"Of a truth, and Rome is as full of thieves and vagabonds as ever it was in that chieftain's palmiest day," said the ambassador, with a forced smile. "Signor Orsino, you are aware that it is not the policy of my serene lords to make peace between your faction and the duke; but surely his affairs being at such a pass and low ebb, he could not but have every motive to act sincerely and fairly by you, who are the chief agent in this reconciliation?"

"Moreover," said the Orsino, eagerly snatching at this straw, "in proof of his sincerity, Cæsar betrayed to me the secret dealings of those gentlemen of Bologna with him, the Marescotti, who were willing, from their hatred of the Bentivogli, to surrender the city to him."

"He betrayed them because he thought they had not power to keep their promises," said the relentless Hospitaller.

"Then is he a very shame of knighthood, a base disloyal chevalier!" exclaimed Sir Reginald vehemently.

"Dare you tell him so in Rome, Sir Knight?" said Machiavelli, with an uneasy smile.

"Yea, or in his native hell!" returned the young knight. A slight gesture from the zany cut short some reply which Messer Niccolò intended to have made. "Nay ye cannot blame some eggs for hatching crocodiles," the former observed, with his strange unmeaning look presenting its usual contrast to his pregnant words.

"I do grieve to hear ye talk in this heedless manner, gentlemen," said the canon; "for indeed you must needs involve our holy mother, the church herself, in this scandal which you throw upon her supreme minister on earth; yea, sap the foundations of our blessed faith, for can that religion be divine which has a monster of abominable wickedness for its representative on earth?"

"He was elected by simony, and therefore but usurps his seat until the thunder drives him out of it," returned the Hospitaller with vehemence.

"Or the confederacy of the Roman barons, who I do hear plot some such security to themselves," said the Florentine ambassador.

"The vengeance of heaven has already overtaken his electors, and even by his agency, for their sin against the Holy Ghost," continued the Knight of St. John. "Cardinal Colonna is in exile, Julian della Rovere, Ascanio Sforza, Savelli, are stripped of their possessions, and have fled from Rome for their lives; the old Cardinal of Capua was poisoned; Cardinal Orsino and the Archbishop of Florence will be destroyed in time with the rest of their name, Signor Paolo!—Cardinal Michele died very suddenly—but then he was old and rich."

"And yet it may well be that Heaven . . . that is—only so violent and terrible a spirit as that of his sanctity could restore the grandeur of the church, and her plundered inheritance, and therefore Heaven may have suffered his elevation," said the canon, somewhat staggered.

"Nay, 'tis perchance the devil's master-piece, to poison the source that men may refuse to drink of the stream, or to set them on digging wells of heresy for themselves and their children to drink destruction at," said Messer Niccolò, with a subtle and as it were inward smile.

"A lawyer, a soldier, and a priest!—is that the receipt to make a devil, uncle, for he hath been all by turns?" said the Zany.

"And adjudged so great in all!" replied the Florentine. "Surely there hath been infinitely worse said of him than he deserved; 'tis his immoderate love of power, and of his children, his desire to aggrandize his name, his vast and furious passions, which have driven him into such monstrous acts of tyranny, which are yet so well directed that they can scarcely be accused of injustice. Which of his victims has not deserved his fate?"

"But how accuse you the cardinal of simony, when, at the time of his election, no saint in Heaven ever had so high a reputation for all divine and human virtue as he had on earth?" chimed in the canon.

"Hideous hypocrisy!" returned the Knight of St. John. "But I am willing to admit that his son is the worse demon of the two, and that he stimulates the angry old man to his furious acts; for until Cæsar acquired influence in his counsels, Rome was governed as if by the Areopagus. Nay, even now, at times, they say, he bath fits of remorse, and would halt, but for the torrent which urges him on! Alexander is a mad tiger, but Cæsar is a cross between the tiger and the snake."

"Noble knight, I would advise you, for your goodly person's sake, let not the walls hear you whisper matter like this in Rome," said the ambassador, very earnestly.

"In Rome my deliverer will be under my custody; and we Orsini have bearded the pope and Cæsar both in it!" said Signor Paolo, with a haughty flush of his pale cheeks.

"I know your family is very powerful, my lord; but you speak it strangely for a vassal of the Holy See," returned Messer Niccolò, coldly.

"If there be one species of wickedness this Cæsar hath not committed, by'r lady, I know not what name he gives it in confession!" said the young English knight. "In my land we should have smothered him at his birth, had he shown his soul in his visage!"

"Why strangled ye not your king then, Cæsar's pattern, Richard Crookback?" said the canon, drily. "Shone the sun ever on a blacker miscreant than he?"

"Speak not against King Richard, or, by the mass! — cry you mercy, sir canon! but you know not that 'twas that brave king who made me a knight, on the morning of Bosworth field, and gave me the broom from his own bonnet for a cognizance!" exclaimed Le Beaufort, warmly.

"Marry, and what good feat of arms had you done, being, as I take it, then scarcely a dozen years old?" said Ser Machiavelli. "Tell me, I pray you, sir, for I know that king did little without a reason."

"My father, brother, and their following withdrew, in the night, to join Richmond, that is now king," replied the knight. "But I, who knew nothing of Richard's misdeeds, and loved his valiant chivalry, secretly left them and returned to his camp; which, when he knew, he swore by St. Paul I was worth all my kindred, and shouting, 'Oh, mon Beaufort, seras le Beaufort,' he drew his sword and knighted me, with so hearty a stroke that my back ached for a week after,—when the poor king himself was nigh rotten in Leicester Abbey."

"In very faith, brother Reginald, a notary might make a fair penny of the list of the Cæsar's crimes," continued the Hospitaller, with unslackened heat.

"Crimes imputed, sir, it were more fit and just to say," returned Messer Niccolò, speaking also with much warmth. "But what hath been proved against the Borgias? Are the accusations of their bitter enemies,

whom they have dispossessed of unjust and insolent usurpations, to be taken for gospel? Alexander endeavours to restore the rights of the Church over her vassals; they resist—he crushes them—he is therefore a tyrant! The princes of the Church rebel against their sovereign—he banishes their persons, and confiscates their wealth—he is therefore an oppressor! His eldest son fails by the hand of a secret rival, and therefore his brother has slain him, and oh, horror of horrors, animated by what unimaginable jealousy!"

"The sous-in-law of the pontiff are slaughtered one after another, and men hint there is a reason for it," said the Hospitaller, ironically imitating the tone of Messer Niccolò. "The Bishop of Selta is poisoned, and country folks dream that he perished for daring to falsify Cæsar's denial that he had brought the bull with him to France which dissolved the marriage of King Louis with his cousin, the cripple, and gave him the buxom widow of Brittany to spouse. They war down the chief barons of Rome, and utterly ruin them; turn their arms against the feudatories of Romagna, and then people have the simplicity to think they mean to erect their own tyranny on the ruins of the common liberties!"

"Some old voluptuaries die suddenly, and therefore Cæsar has poisoned them!" said Messer Niccolò, with a degree of pettishness, which even his practised dissimulation could not suppress, in his tones.

"Nay, young ones, too!" retorted the resolute Hospitaller. "The Grand Signor offers three hundred thousand gold ducats for the life of his rebel and fugitive brother, Sultan Zeni; and even in the very camp of the King of France, who did so lovingly intend to use him in his crusade against the accursed Turk, he perished, by poison."

"And therefore follows it of course that the Borgias did it? If Bajazet would give so great a price for his brother's death, could he find no other hand nor means to procure it?" said the Florentine.

"Cicero's question regarding a crime whose perpetrator is unknown were a fair touchstone—*Cui bono*, to whose advantage was it?" returned the Hospitaller. "Who but Cæsar inherited the young Turk's treasures, his seraglio, and all the plunder which he had borne into Italy after the failure of his rebellion?"

"The state is the lawful heir of all foreigners who die without leaving any other, and it pleased the sacred chamber to transfer its rights to monsignor the Cardinal of Valenza, as he then was," interposed the Orsino.

"You mean, my lord, that it pleased the Cardinal of Valenza to have it, and the protonotary, Giovanni Battista Ferraro, to sign it over to him in the name of the sacred chamber," returned the Hospitaller. "The cardinal of Valenza! a sweet churchman, truly, that stole a dedicated nun from the cloisters, and one too that bore the noblest name in Rome, a Colonna."

"You shall pardon me, sir; the Orsini yield to none; our charters are the oldest which the church ever granted!" said Signor Paolo, with an asperity, which was perhaps as much occasioned by the disparaging tone of the religious knight's observations upon his promised bride, as even the fierce hatred and emulation which had existed between his race and that of the Colonnas for many ages. "Moreover, 'tis well known that it was the pagan sultan who lured that hapless damosel to her destruction, eternal and temporal."

"Nay, that was only the pretext which that chivalrous Turk allowed to

be used, to varnish Alexander's refusal to seize and punish her as the canon law enjoins," said the stern Knight of St. John.

"Messer Bembo, I pray you tell me what punishment that may be?" said Sir Reginald, turning to the ecclesiastic with an expression of some interest.

"Her punishment would be immuration; that is, she ought to be bricked up in the convent wall, and in the cloisters where the sisters walk, that they may not soon forget it," replied the canon, gravely. "But you do not often hear of these sentences being properly executed, to the great relaxation of discipline."

"Then all honour to Pope Alexander, and I drink his health a thousand times, that would not suffer it!" exclaimed the hearty young English knight, swallowing a deep draught of the canon's wine.

"Methinks, gentlemen, the night being far wasted, and this conversation likely to bear no good fruit, it were time we hopped up on our perches," interrupted Ser Machiavelli, with a feigned yawn. "Signor Paolo, you most of all need rest."

"But I would not have it last too long," said the Orsino, starting from a reverie into which he had fallen, and looking palely around at the sleeping soldiery, and the silent Carthusians, who had yet been listening with the eager interest which only men so long secluded from the world take in its affairs. "Who knows," he continued, in explanation of the somewhat singular observation, "who knows what these wild soldiers of the Borgia's may have overheard or project?" And his eye fell with a puzzled and profound earnestness on the countenance of the fool, who had for some time nodded and dozed on his lowly couch.

"I will watch, then," said Sir Reginald, "and, lest I fall asleep, will stride up and down the hall till I see as many shadows on the wall as there are moonbeams on the windows."

"Brother, we will watch turn about," said the Hospitaller, gravely smiling, "or we shall have thee dropping from the saddle to-morrow."

"That will be much the best," said the canon, who loved his ease and safety almost equally. "And but that I am nigh dead with the jolting of my mule, I would let none of you share the vigil with me, for you are young and need rest, God knows." So saying, he adjusted himself as comfortable a couch as he could achieve out of the materials at hand, and finally fell asleep on it, without learning with any nicety the issue of a controversy which arose between the Orsino and his two deliverers, the former of whom insisted on taking his turn in this seemingly superfluous watch. But so powerfully worked in men's imaginations the extraordinary anecdotes of the Borgian subtlety and cruelty, which had formed the staple of the conversation, that no one seemed to perceive anything ridiculous or excessive in the precaution.

CHAPTER X.

"Nihil jus, nihil fas; aurum, vis, et Venus imperabat."
Cardinal of Viterbo.

No laws, no rights; gold, violence, and licentiousness ruling all.

Whether the Hospitaller and his wild-spirited young comrade kept their watches so sedulously as they had promised, we cannot take upon us to aver; but the restlessness of the Orsino, who, notwithstanding his exhaustion, scarcely slept three minutes together without starting awake, rendered any other vigilance almost unnecessary. He was the first to announce the break of day, and to rouse the travellers, urging the expediency of reaching the plains before the heat of the sun set in. The Orsino's anxiety to be in Rome had become akin to a passion in its extreme eagerness and impatience; but it took a somewhat discourteous form when he privately urged on the English knight that they should set forward without waiting for the company of Ser Machiavelli and his men-at-arms, which he declared would very much delay them. If Sir Reginald intended to accede to this arrangement, it was foiled by the zany, who suddenly started from his slumbers, and blew a blast upon a horn, which chanced to be near him, so loud and shrill, that it would have awakened Arthur and all his knights from the petrified sleep in the Welch cavern. The effect was instantaneous, and so far from parting company, Ser Niccolò, still rubbing his eyes, entreated that his fellow-pilgrims would not hurry themselves, for rather than miss their society, he would tarry the whole day.

Paolo's diligence, however, at least hastened the departure. Mass was said, a solemn benediction bestowed by the prior of the Carthusians, and leaving divers gifts, and the promise of many more, but truth to say with but a scanty breakfast, the military cavalcade streamed, glittering and irregular as a mountain water, down to the shores of the Nar, or Nera, as it is more commonly called in Italy. The monks watched the departure from their rocky heights, and as they disappeared, one or two so far overcame their stoicism as to wave a farewell with their brown, bare arms.

It was a morning such as is only seen in southern climates, and at similar elevations—the air so pure and bright that it seemed to show all objects as if through a shining medium of glass. A faint rosiness tinged the transparent blue of the sky, and all the tops of the mountains were touched with a deeper hue of the same beautiful colour. The valley, although partially veiled in mists, began to disclose its richness and variety. Little villages appeared nestling at the craggy bases of the mountains; castles and minor forts towered on remote pinnacles; forests of beech and pine waved freshly in the wind; pastures of the brightest emerald green bordered the river; every rock displayed in its nooks and crannies wild flowers of brilliant hues; every fan of the soft morning breeze brought some sweet scent! The very cataract, though lost in snowy mists, wore a diadem—a rainbow spanning it in a circular form of the palest pink and azure. So fresh and lovely shone the scene, that as they journeyed on

the wild path which bordered the river, among its tangled underwood of myrtles, stunted vines, and high weeds, which sometimes nearly concealed both horse and rider, while the loftier forest trees showered their golden dew continually on them as they passed, the canon could not hinder himself from exclaiming aloud, "This is Italy!—Lombardy is a lie."

An echo of surprising distinctness and musical cadence immediately took up the words, and repeated them in sweet low murmurs, so like the remote melody of women's voices, that for a moment the canon stared aghast. But remembering himself, he observed in soliloquy, "No marvel they fable Echo a nymph—there seemed to be a hundred babbling to one another yonder! But it is some comfort to behold these fat pastures! We shall come to something by and by not fed—or rather starved—for the tables of yonder mortified men, who might consider that whatever merit there is in their own abstinence, none thereof accrues to those whom their inhospitality compels to share it!"

The cavalcade proceeded with as much order as the ruggedness of the way allowed, which dived into valleys and ascended craggy steeps apparently at pleasure of its own sweet will, but seldom leaving the river at any considerable distance. The Orsino and Sir Reginald kept each other close company, the former mounted on a horse belonging to one of the latter's robust followers, who yet easily maintained his place with the train on foot.

Perhaps the very contrariety of character between the Italian noble and his new friend was one of the causes of the liking they had evidently taken to each other. The frank, joyous, unsuspecting nature of the one, afforded a secret satisfaction to the dark, impassioned, and brooding genius of the other. The vivacity and careless good nature of the Knight of the Sun presented humanity under a light which the black experience of the times had rarely offered to the Italian baron. It was a relief to the overwrought and complex mind to watch the undisguised and simple operations of intellect almost in a state of nature, untrammelled by too much knowledge either of books or men. The English nobility plumed themselves in that age chiefly on physical qualities. They very much resembled their ancestors of the Round Table, when Merlin put upon them the jocularity of asking their counsel on affairs of state; who, after looking at each other for some time, at a loss to understand what was required of them, unanimously exclaimed, "We are very big!" On the contrary, the Italians had reached,—or rather had retained, from the ruins of their ancient civilization,—a diseased excess of the intellectual qualities,—and their rulers, who considered politics as a game of skill, were astonished and overwhelmed at the first shock of the nations who, in the fifteenth century, contended for the possession of Italy. War with the Italians had become almost a bloodless game—a tournament in the open field—when Charles VIII. invaded Naples, and the first experience of the sanguinary earnestness of the transalpine warfare infused a terror into the conquered, which was only succeeded by a still more bloody ferocity in themselves. These two convulsive epochs produced such mingled characters as Paolo Orsino and Caesar Borgia, comparing them merely in the union at once of southern subtlety with northern ferocity.

Messer Benbo and the Florentine ambassador kept up such grave conversation as suited their dignified stations, on the aspect of political affairs, in which the great labour of both was to hide their real opinions, and

worm out each other's. The Hospitaller but rarely seemed to notice what was said, except occasionally by sternly smiling at some enthusiastic praise of the Lady Luerezia, which Paolo frequently managed to introduce into his discourse. The warmth of the Lord Paolo's imagination, and perhaps a secret desire to apologize for the strange weakness of loving a woman whose brother he believed to have attempted his life, and whose name was so fearfully darkened, gave his eloquence on this point a glow of colour which the subject and the voluptuous influence of the sunny air they breathed, made less wearisome to his hearers than such eulogiums usually are. Meanwhile the zany flitted about, sometimes behind, sometimes in front, sometimes shooting far ahead of the troop; now engaged in a mock deep conversation with a trooper, then darting off in pursuit of some bee humming among the aromatic furze, which he deprived of its honey-bag with great skill, so as not to be stung by the luckless insect as he slowly unravelled out its bowels, returning from his excursions fantastically crowned with golden thistles, or with his mantle richly ornamented with burrs. The Orsino watched this volatile being at times with an unquiet eye, but to as little purpose as one might the inconstant light reflected from dancing water.

But few persons passed the travellers on this unfrequented road; at times a solitary pilgrim emerged from some secluded nook in which he had passed the night; or a hermit appeared at prayers, perched in some hole of the cliffs above; or a peasant, bronzed almost to blackness, bent in abject homage to the warlike train as it passed the entrance of his wild ravine. The procession was fast disentangling itself from the tortuous bases of the mountains, and the canon was in high spirits, expatiating on the various scenes they passed, and displaying great antiquarian learning to very insensible listeners, when they suddenly came in sight of the ruined arches of a bridge of vast marble blocks, which had once united the two sides of the defile by crossing the river. On its lofty summit appeared two figures; one, that of a goat, quietly browsing on the edge of the broken central arch, the other, to judge by the momentary flash of the sun on it as it disappeared, a man in steel. Though the crags beneath the bridge appeared a steep hill, covered with cypress trees and leaden-tinted olives, through which peeped numerous towers and terraces, as if of some flourishing city.

The canon endeavoured for a moment to persuade himself that he had not seen the glitter of armour on the bridge; but while he was reasoning with his senses on the subject, a trumpet was audible at no great distance, which was immediately answered by one more remote, and suddenly a body of horsemen, in bright armour, with spears set in the rests, and banners streaming, emerged from the groves of the hilly city. Our travellers simultaneously reined up their horses, and gazed in great alarm at the advancing troop.

“Perhaps they are only pilgrims going to Rome,” said the canon, desperately.

“Why, then, are they in armour, and with their backs turned to Rome?” replied the Knight of St. John.

“Mayhap they are friends of my Lord Paolo, come to see how it fares with him?” said Machiavelli, with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

“I know not how my friends should dare to leave Rome in such force, considering whom they may expect to find at the gates on their return!” exclaimed the Orsino. “But, no, Our sweet Mother in Heaven! see you

not it is the banner of the church ! the cross keys ! the sword of St. Peter !”

“ Ho, there, spears in rest !” shouted Sir Reginald, looking round for his men, but he was somewhat surprised to observe that his immediate followers were the Borgian guards—who, however, couched their lances instantly.

“ Beware, sirs ! look that you are not assailed both in front and back !” said Messer Niccolò in a low tone, and adding, with an expression of sarcastic humour, “ you and I are safe enough, brother Bembo ; for doubtless you will now think it meet to take upon you your true and inviolable character of ambassador from the Duke of Ferrara !”

“ Messer Niccolò, your jests might find a fitter season,” said the canon, in a strange flutter. “ But, at all events, we are vowed pilgrims to the blessed jubilee, and—but these fellows may be only vassals of some noble airing their horses, or foragers of Ronciglione.”

“ And yonder is the jester among them ! I do hope they will not maltreat the gibbering idiot—but I know that I am lost !” said the Orsino, in a calm and deliberate tone of despair.

“ I, for one, will not desert you, the betrothed of Donna Lucrezia, and on that faith will mingle blood with you !” said the Hospitaller, and drawing his dagger he pricked his arm till the blood spurted from the wound, and handed it covered with crimson to the Lord Paolo.

The latter immediately, in the enthusiasm of gratitude, tore open his doublet, and drew the drops which he mingled from his breast, directly above the heart : and he had scarcely performed his part in the ceremony ere Sir Reginald snatched the weapon, and after hesitating for an instant, as if to select the most appropriate proof of his friendly zeal, slashed a little cross in his broad left shoulder, from which he unclasped the armour. This was a ceremony which constituted the three knights brothers-in-arms, and was one of the most sacred and indissoluble rites of chivalry. And hardly had the affrighted canon surveyed in sorrow the consummation of an act which imposed duties so likely to prove inconvenient, ere the approaching horsemen halted with a sudden clash of arms under the ruined bridge, whose arches towered at a great height above them.

The spare, but tall and sinewy figures, the buff armour, the prodigiously long spears, round shields, and cross-bows ; the vast mustachios and beards, the exact discipline, the small fiery jennets which they gauntly bestrode, the red ruffs round their necks, the numerous leaden Lambs-of-God with which their breasts were studded : marked the troops to be Spanish, or rather Catalan, for those national designations were still kept as jealously distinct as Scot and Englishman, or Burgundian and Frenchman : although, unlike the latter, the provinces of the peninsula might be considered as united into one monarchy under Ferdinand and Isabel.

The leader of this party seemed to be a horseman who separated himself from their ranks, and came riding at a slow and equable pace towards the pilgrims, giving ample leisure to form a correct idea of his personnel. He was of middle stature and of a spare frame, which was yet muscularly powerful, war-worn until the flesh seemed as tough as leather. The features were lean and large, and mingled something of the Arab in the hard-cut nostrils, thick lips, olive complexion, and coarse hair, thick and wiry as that of a bull. The eye had nothing of the mistrust and melancholy thought of the Italian ; but it was reserved, stern, and, so to speak, stonily determined, without giving a hint on what ; the gazer felt that

there were few human weaknesses remaining in the soul which looked out at those cold crystals. He was armed at all points in dull iron plates excepting the head, on which he wore a steel cap, by way of relaxation from the weight of his helmet, which he carried at the pommel of his high saddle.

Abasing his lance with an appearance of some deference, the stranger approached the group of pilgrims, surveying them with fixed but not menacing attention. The Knight of St. John spurred his horse slightly forward, with a haughty wave of his lance, and the opposite cavalier immediately drew his rein, horse and rider standing fixed as an equestrian statue in bronze.

"Is your business with us, condottiero?" said the Hospitaller, who observed at a glance that his opponent wore not the golden spurs of knighthood. "Or wherefore have you halted your men in our way?"

"My name is Don Miguel de Murviedro—Migueloto men commonly call me—captain of the castle and legation of Ronciglione, reverend knight!" replied the Catalan with stern conciseness. "Therefore, methinks I have some right to inquire what your armed band do here at Narni; else I am but little inclined to a dispute, for I am on an errand that brooks no delay, from my commander, the Podestà of Romagna; being to seek out, and rescue, if need be, by force of arms, the person of his holiness's son-in-law elect, the most noble lord, Dom Paolo Orsino, from the hands of certain traitors and vagabond plunderers who have seized and confined him for ransom in the hills about the Marble Fall."

"Then, sir, you may even turn back rejoicing, for I am rescued and in perfect safety, journeying here with my friends!" said the Italian knight, advancing and gazing with wild and startled earnestness at the iron figure before him, either from some secret suspicion which entered his mind, or from the recollection that he beheld before him a man who was believed to be the instrument of Caesar's most atrocious deeds, at once a bloody soldier of fortune and a crafty assassin.

"Then, my most illustrious lord, I shall have the honour of escorting your excellency to the castle of Ronciglione," replied the condottiero, alighting, as it seemed, to show his profound respect; "Don Remiro awaits you there, and will thence accompany your lordship to Rome."

"I thank you, valiant gentleman, and your sender, but it needs not, as I am now in good and sure hands, to whom I joyfully entrust myself," replied the Orsino.

"I pray your noble lordship to remember that I am soldier, sworn to obey his officers, and the supreme podestà has sent me on this errand and no other, to bring your excellent person to Ronciglione," replied Migueloto, with a tone and gesture which struggled between cajolery and command. "After what has happened, Don Remiro will not permit a safety so essential to that of the state, so dear to the duke, his master, to be under any other guardianship but his own. My life may pay the penalty of disobedience."

"You mean not of a surety to say that you will take this gentleman with you against his will?" said Le Beanfort, impatiently vibrating his lance.

"I must obey the orders of the lieutenant of the Duke of Romagna, sir knight," replied the Catalan, with a smile darkening rather than lighting his visage. "And, if I mistake not, you have lances belonging to his highness both before and behind you. Therefore I leave your excellencies

to deliberation ; but you cannot and must not pass on this way but in my company, and to Ronciglione."

Enraged at this reply, Le Beaufort couched his lance impetuously, but Bembo and Ser Niccolò both seized it, while the Catalan, affecting not to notice the action, and bowing almost to his belt, backed his horse to the troopers beyond the aqueduct.

" What is to be done ? " said the canon in a doleful voice ; " it is impossible for us to resist."

" So long as they stand one to ten my English will not turn their backs ! " exclaimed Le Beaufort.

" But, meanwhile your own backs should be looked to, sir," said Machiavelli ; " it were not, perchance, inexpedient to remember as much whom you have behind as before."

" Nay, gallant brothers, you shall not uselessly perish in so hopeless a brawl, for my sake," said the Orsino sadly, but adding more cheerfully, " Don Remiro is not altogether my unfriend ; and but for this Migueloto ! —laugh at me and my moony madness if you will,—but it seems to me as if he resembled in stature and voice the chief of the Black Band which captured me ! "

" Sound then a charge, and if these rogues behind us stir—let them look to their own rear ; " said the fiery young Knight of the Sun.

" Tush, brother, it were certain overthrow ! But ill betide me when I desert a companion by blood ! " said the more sober Hospitaller. " We will with Signor Paolo to Ronciglione ; and our presence may haply avert any mischief, if mischief be intended."

" What else by a Borgia ? " muttered the canon. " And moreover, I have oft known suspicion put the harm into people's heads, as heaping sand-bags directs besiegers where they are most dangerous."

But despite this and much more eloquent protest, the canon's advice was overruled, and the brothers-in-arms resolved to swim or sink together. It was agreed that the Orsino should announce their resolution to Don Migueloto, Ser Niccolò consenting, with another of his emphatic shrugs, to see that the conditions were duly observed, while Le Beaufort rejoined his own men, and prepared them for either event. But on turning with that intent, and riding towards the escort, he perceived to his great indignation that they kept their spears couched as if to receive him on the points.

" St. George and rescue ? " shouted the impetuous knight in English, rising in the stirrup and setting his lance ; and his followers, hearing the cry, suddenly couched the long spears on which they had been leaning, though quite unconscious of the occasion of so abrupt a breach of good fellowship. But at this moment the zany, springing nimbly before Sir Reginald, called to the escort to open their ranks in a tone which they instinctively obeyed. He then ran up the passage thus made, striking with his bauble saucily on both sides, until he reached the English men-at-arms.

" Broom-flowers ! broom-flowers ! St. George, the dragon wants you ! " he said, with a loud idiotic laugh.

Observing that their lord motioned them to advance, the English riders immediately filed through the open ranks of their quondam allies, and rejoined him at the instant that the Orsino and Ser Niccolò returned to say that Don Migueloto was perfectly willing to accede to the required terms.

Matters were now arranged apparently to the satisfaction of all parties; Migueloto, with a courteous apology, directing his soldiers to take the lead in the ascent towards Narni. But he himself waited beneath the arches, with his steel cap in his hand, until the knights, the ambassador, and the canon, with their English men-at-arms, had passed through. Cæsar's guardsmen then set their horses in motion, and followed, so that the little party in the centre were very completely enclosed.

Perhaps aware that his presence might suggest recollections which he did not desire to rouse, Don Migueloto lingered to some distance in the rear. It was certainly not to admire the magnificent combinations of scenery which the ascent to Narni offered—its castled summit overlooking a wide expanse of forest, and the valley through which tumbled and foamed the Nar from its lofty hem in the mountains—that Don Migueloto occasionally paused and looked around. If his eye rested for a moment on the superb landscape, it was only to form a vague idea of the goodly plunder which so rich a land might yield, not to enjoy the gorgeous variety of beauty which its mountains, forests, and vast valley offered to the eye.

The real object of his search soon appeared, in the person of the zany, who came bounding and gibbering along, until he reached the Catalan's side, when, with a leap of singular agility, he suddenly seated himself on the crupper behind him.

“Go on; they will but take it for a fool's jest, even if they observe us,” said the zany, in a tone of habitual authority. “By'r lady! it costs me some trouble to put my skeins in order after such a raveling as thy blundering hand has made!”

“By the beard of Santiago, my lord, I am not to blame in the matter!” replied Don Migueloto. “Such is Don Remiro's vigilance, that my men could not by any means have traversed the country without his permission; but when I showed him your grace's unlimited commission, he had the insolence to produce an order under his holiness's own hand, commanding him on pain of his head to escort the Orsino safely to the gates of Rome; or if his lordship chose to keep his incognito, to observe that he sustained no damage or molestation on the way. When I asked him how he came to think that any harm was intended to the Lord Paolo, he replied that his holiness had taken alarm on that matter only; so if my business touched not the Orsino, I was at freedom to fulfil your honoured commands.”

“Ay, indeed! and not otherwise?” murmured the jester.

“Nay, my lord, for when I found myself driven to a pass at which I was bound to acknowledge your gracious will, he disputed a good hour that you could not mean any such treachery, as he called it; and said at last that he was podestà of the Church, and not of the Duke of Romagna.”

“Ha! is he of that opinion!” exclaimed the Borgia. “Ungrateful bosom-serpent! Have I supported this sanguinary judge so long,—this bloodier Draco,—not only against the outcries of the people, but the angry remonstrances of my father,—but for this!”

“Perchance there are folks at Rome who were not grieved to see what hatred to your government is planted in men's hearts by the podestà's relentless justice!” returned the insidious ruffian.

“Good!—but they shall learn I know how to use men so as they shall do me all the good they can, and none of the harm,” returned the Borgia.

"Remiro has crushed Romagna into order and obedience; what if I turn him forth as a goat of atonement into the wilderness?"

"I fear your grace's friends will have less cause to love him still; I know there are great messages passing between the Vatican and Ronciglione!" said Don Migueloto. "Even when at length I expounded your gracious purpose most clearly, he turned as pale as a goose's liver, and would only consent that I should capture the Orsino until he could receive tidings of your pleasure from your own lips! That is, till he could warn the Orsino in Rome, and the Vitelli, at Castello; and this on threat of sawing me in halves if I disobeyed!"

"Sawing thee in halves!—this Aragonian teaches me a way of death I did not know, but a good punishment for traitors!" said Cæsar, thoughtfully. "Is he not very rich, too—very rich, considering the needs of the state, and the oppressions of the poor peasants?"

"And therefore he strives so hard to win our holy father's sunshine?" said the Catalan. "He fears your grace much more than loves you, and gropes about for help; and his extorted wealth is lodged in Ronciglione to prevent surprise."

"Deem you these soldiers are to be depended upon?" returned Cæsar, with a slight smile.

"Their terrors of Remiro can only be overcome by your personal interference," replied the Catalan, "I am an officer of no eminent command, as your highness knows."

"Tut, tut, thou art on thy way to a better!" returned the Borgia.

"So your goodness was pleased to promise me on an occasion—"

"I tell thee I have not forgotten it! 'Tis against thyself to remind me of my promises, for I have much greater largess in store for thee!" interrupted Cæsar, impatiently. "Has the sun ever ceased to shine upon thee since thou didst aid me to remove that shadow which covered mine? How long is it, rogue, since thou wert in Rome?"

"I pray your grace to remember that I am a born gentleman, and may not brook a title which we only bestow on low-born scum and varlets!" said the Catalan, haughtily.

"In faith I cannot mend it unless for a worse," said Cæsar, with a scornful laugh. "Go to, gentleman and villain! how long is it since thou wert in Rome?"

"Your orders found me there, monsignor," replied the ruffian, somewhat cowed in tone.

"Indeed! then I may gather news at will; for thou art none of those who look on and see nothing, or bring half tidings which but puzzle expectation! How is my peevish sire? what thinks he of these latest doings of ours?"

"Even as ever, my lord; glorying in the aggrandizement of his house, but starting and shirking at the means," returned Migueloto.

"Nay, that is not all!—what said he to my messenger, that carried him the keys of Faenza?" said the Borgia, gloomily. "Cæsar is making me a giant,—but a giant in chains!"

"In sad truth, his holiness grows very snarling and suspicious with age," said the Catalan.

"I hear he hath named the old dotard, Cardinal Piccolomini of Sienna, to command in Santangelo!" returned Cæsar, sharply, "during the jubilee?"

"What matters it, signor, when the Germans and Gascons in it are

yours to a man!" said Don Migueloto. "Yet 'tis a sad thought to remember how much depends on the whims of a choleric old man, whose conscience is subject to fits of the qualms!"

"Speak with more respect, infidel, of the successor of St. Peter!" said Cæsar, in a jesting tone. "But what are the news from Milan, for I have heard none during these tramping days of mine, wandering among my citadels?"

"A herald from the King of France passed through Ronciglione yesterday with, I fear, some bitter message from his king at Milan to our holy father and your highness!" replied Don Migueloto.

"The King of France at Milan!—surely you jest, my stout Migueloto!" exclaimed Cæsar, with an expression of mingled wonder and consternation.

"Monsignor, is it possible you have not heard how the French have rushed on Milan, destroyed and slaughtered all opposers; and that Duke Sforza is now their prisoner by the treachery of his Swiss?"

"You rave, man!—it cannot be! The last accounts left their foragers in Savoy!" continued Cæsar, incredulously. But the details which his confidant now poured out of the extraordinary conquest which Louis XII. effected of the Milanese after their second revolt, left no room for doubt.

"Here were matter now for a good morality on the fall of wicked princes!" said Cæsar, recovering from his surprise. "And yet, so subtle a brain—welcomed back so joyfully by his subjects—how could it chance? Did he not pay his mercenaries enough, or too much? Friend Niccolò, this is a problem which I must have thee to solve for me. Those accursed Swiss! who, after this, will trust them?"

"Certes, not your grace; and I misdoubt if they have forgotten that glorious massacre you made among them in Rome, in revenge for the pillage of your mother's house by their brethren of King Charles's army," said Migueloto.

"Thou knowest men but little, if thou deemest there is any bottom to their credulity," returned the Borgia, sharply.

"His holiness seems to think as I do, notwithstanding, signor, since he has made those whom his interposition saved from our swords guards to my most noble lady, Donna Lucrezia!" said Migueloto, with a peculiarly leering and malignant expression.

"Soh!" was the only observation in return, which was yet full of meaning to the initiated attendant.

"And on the news of your highness's happy return, he has added a hundred light-armed estradiots of the fugitive Albanian Greeks, who keep skimming all over the country around Nepi, like fire-flies round a pool," continued Migueloto.

"Nepi! what doth she there?" said Cæsar, with affected carelessness.

"Performs a penance—for other folks' sins, perchance!" replied Don Migueloto, with a dark smile. "For doubtless, in honour of your victories and happy return, his sanctity has created his daughter Duchess of Nepi, a seigneurie which takes her oft from Rome, and which hath a strong castle."

"Jest not with me, Migueloto: 'tis ill tickling a gored hound," said Cæsar, with a flash of passion which effectually awed his companion out of his jocose mood; and then, as if wishing to banish the subject, he continued, "But truly this strange success of the French alters all my views! I am already sufficiently pressed by the rebellious confederates,

and I fear me France will be peevish for my necessary denial of the troops to the constable of Milan. Who could have dreamed of so sudden a turn in the luck!"

"Your enemies will everywhere take heart, my lord," said Migueloto, dolefully.

"One good may yet be derived from this evil," returned Cæsar. "I can depend no longer on the French, and the pope cannot deny me now to raise an Italian army of my own, which Niccolò doth above all things advise."

Migueloto shook his head with a crafty smile. "He will rather make peace with the Colonnas themselves, than set your grace in such mastery," he replied.

"Said I not that even this mischance of the Orsino was meant by fortune to my advantage?" exclaimed Cæsar. "I must have peace with his faction at every risk, to avert the Colonnas, and therefore do now rejoice in his safety."

"At every risk, my lord?" said Don Migueloto, with the same disgusting leer overspreading his evil countenance.

"No, I will never again endure—but, tush, let us to our news again!" said Cæsar, with a vehemence which he almost instantly checked. "How is the Cardinal Borgia, my cousin? he was ailing when he left me at Faenza."

"Alack, my lord, he died of a disease as sudden as the plague, on his way to Rome, three days are gone," said Migueloto, in a tone of hypocritical sorrow.

"He was no friend of mine; and I regret only that he did not die coming from some other quarter than my camp," returned Cæsar. "I'll warrant me—because the man was always eating melons—they will say I poisoned him! But at all events, tell me better news of my dear friend, Monsignor Agnelli, archbishop of Cosenza, clerk of the chamber, and vice-legate of Viterbo?"

"The morning I left Rome he was found dead in his bed, after eating a most hearty supper!" said Migueloto, laughing outright.

"Alas, poor man, that was sudden! but such holy men are always ready for their calls," said Cæsar, smiling too. "Alas! and what part has my father assigned me in his relics?"

"'Tis to be spent, I hear, on the ceremonies of your reception, and in those of the holy week," said Don Migueloto. "But I marvel your highness has never once inquired after your royal wife."

"Doth she still live then, being in Rome?" said Cæsar, carelessly.

"I have not heard of her death, my lord!" replied Don Migueloto, somewhat startled.

"Why, then, no doubt she is still alive; and Donna Fiamma must be singularly out of spirits with this marriage of mine," continued Cæsar, with a degree of agitation which was visible even in the unconcerned manner which he knew so well how to assume.

"Your grace indeed should have seen her when, six months ago, I delivered her your letter from France, announcing the marriage," said Don Migueloto, with a slight shudder, which, in a man of his steely nature, was of no ordinary significance.

"What! did she stamp and rave like any other deserted drab?" said Cæsar, smiling scornfully.

"Signor, she spoke not a word for many minutes, but looked fixedly at

me, and her face grew white as lightning, and writhed into the very likeness of the Medusa in the Capitol!" replied Don Migueloto. "At last she sighed such a sigh that it seemed as if her heart were rent in twain; and yet she shed but one tear—as large and heavy as a drop of molten lead—wiped it disdainfully away, and gave me a rich ring, as she said, for my good news; and then she laughed, said it was a fair day, and that the sun shone very brightly for a wedding—and so fell senseless on the ground!"

"I am quits with her now, indeed, for that matter of Sultan Zem!" said Cæsar, hurriedly.

"Nay, my lord, I must needs think your highness was jealous there on small occasion," replied Don Migueloto, in a timorous and insinuating tone.

"Perchance!—perchance I think even as thou dost; but, thou knowest not how excellent it is to have an answer ready for an upbraiding woman!" returned the Borgia. "And thou shalt see how easily, with a few honeyed words, and lying protestations, these foolish souls will believe where they love! She will weep and rage at first; but at last will ruffle down like a sea after the storm, when the sun breaks out—for love in a woman's breast, even in its fury, is at worst but the sun murky with a tempest. The violence of its own winds will tear open a way to the golden light, and then is all but the sweeter and calmer for the past frenzy. But peace awhile—this is a fair scene beneath our feet.

It was, indeed, a fair scene; for the travellers had now reached an elevation between the lofty mountains that form the valley of the Nar, which, projecting beyond their vast bases, overlooked the plains of the Tiber. The valley immediately below was filled with a dense forest, beyond which the famous river wound like a monstrous golden serpent, with its yellow folds gleaming at intervals through the rank verdure of the stagnant marshes which bordered it. At the base of the hill upon which they stood were visible the naked columns and shattered porticoes of some Roman ruins, gleaming red in the sultry light. Beyond the river extended a vast savannah, grazed by herds of buffaloes, whose large carcasses were sometimes nearly covered by the rank grass of the marshes: a range of violet-coloured mountains terminated the view to the north; to the south extended a vast plain, bounded only by the silver line of the sea; and immediately in front,—still at a great distance, although from the purity of the atmosphere it seemed almost beneath the point of view,—shone a broad lake of the purest celestial blue, set in a basin of woody hills, the highest of which had the town of Ronciglione at its base, above which arose the massive towers and battlements of its Gothic castle.

"Yonder is Nepi!" said Don Migueloto, checking his horse, and pointing to the left of the tract of country just described, where, on the summit of a craggy eminence, shot high into the air the silvery pinnacles of the ancient cathedral.

"What penance doth she at Nepi? Is it akin to the pilgrimage of my Lady Isabel Visconti, on her vow to St. Mark of Venice, which was so pleasantly spent that on her return she was obliged to poison her husband to preserve his peace from tale-bearers?" said Cæsar, after a moment's pause of gloomy thought.

"Nay, for the rigid Dominican directs it," replied Migueloto. "A man who would whip Venus herself at a cart-tail, and rebuke Diana for forwardness."

"Ay, the Dominican! if I thought that she valued this Orsino so far as to have sent him on the errand which he executed, no circumstances of policy should prevail on me to spare him!" said the Borgia. "I must win some light on this matter; but, meanwhile—yonder they are crossing the bridge—we must clearly decide on what we have to do, for an order understood is half obeyed."

Leaving the Italian chieftain and his confederate to form their plans, we rejoin the cavalcade in the plain, at a moment when, crossing the river, the canon exclaimed, in a fit of poetical and learned delight,—

"*Vides ut alta stet nive candidum
Soracte?*"

and, pointing to the mountain, which shone in the brightness of the horizon like a prodigious mound of frosted silver, he translated the lines for the benefit of his un-Horatian hearers: "Behold how, white with snow, Soracte towers!"

"Sant' Oreste!" repeated the soldiery, and every head was instantly bared in homage to the supposed saint.

"No, no, my brothers!" said the canon, somewhat confused. "But 'tis all one, for if I may credit the short shadows of the poplars, it is noon-day, and, consequently, the hour of the Ave Maria against the Turks, which we will all say together." So saying, he stopped his mule, clasped his hands, and looking up to the hot blue sky, fervently chanted half-a-dozen invocations to Our Lady for protection against, not only the Turks, but all enemies far and near, in which the canon most fervently but secretly included the whole Borgian dynasty. A bright golden cloud which hovered over the military devotees, to a poetical eye might have seemed a throne, from whence the Virgin Queen of heaven listened to her suppliants.

"And now, benedicite, my children, and heartily on, for I trust we shall none of us live to see the church wronged in my person, or in those of the pious pilgrims my companions!" said Messer Benbo, assuming much comfort from the reverence with which the soldiers followed his religious guidance. But at this moment Don Migueloto approached, disengaged of his late companion on the crupper, and directed the march of the escort from the main road over a dismal volcanic waste, diversified at far intervals with cities and monasteries, perched as it seemed on inaccessible summits. A wavy succession of hills, on which the sun shone white with excessive heat, terminated the view in every direction.

The bright verdure of the vegetation which overspread the swamp concealed its pestilential depths, which the sulphurous miasma it sent forth betrayed. The incessant croaking of frogs, the green glister of lizards, darting out of their coverts, the shrill cries of moor-howl, revealed the treachery of that lustrous verdure. But at last even that false luxuriance vanished; a black plain, furrowed all over with streams of lava, which ages of times had not effaced, spread before them. Then appeared a still blacker forest, which climbed the side of a mountain in front, and looked like hearse-plumes waving to the sky, against the radiance of the now westerling sun.

The aspect of the country was not such as was likely to diminish the sinister forebodings of the Orsino; but Ser Niccolò himself seemed to take fright, for he talked of resuming his direct way to Rome. A short conference with Don Migueloto either allayed or overruled his apprehensions,

and the whole cavalcade finally entered the forest, which wound upwards with great steepness along lofty layers of crags. Abysses of forest soon appeared on every side, ancient as the mountain itself, the trees so gnarled and intertwined at times that light could not penetrate, and seeming as if struggling together in inextricable conflict into the ravines below. Strange gleams of red light pierced at intervals; the howlings of unseen wild beasts were audible; the cries of ill-omened birds; and yet the ferocity of man was as usual more direful than that of nature. On reaching the summit of the mountain, and commencing the descent on the opposite side, the road was skirted with oak trees of extraordinary majesty; on every twelfth one of which, for the space of sixty, hung the carcass of a man! These unfortunate persons seemed by their garbs to be serfs belonging to some chieftain, who had been pleased to brand their right arms with a cross.

The jester had again rejoined Migueloto, who was now in advance of his prisoners; and after a moment's careless glance at the carcasses which poisoned the air with the scents of decomposition, he inquired for what and by whom they had been thus suspended.

“By Don Remiro, for the love of the Colonnas!” replied the malignant captain of Roneiglione. “Yonder is the fortress of Agapit Colonna, which, in defiance of his lordship’s order to the contrary, and your sworn determination, he persisted in secretly furnishing with provisions and men of his vassalage. Whereupon, refusing to undertake a siege without danger or difficulty, the podestà sent him word that until he submitted to receive your garrison, he would hang one of his thralls every day, until not a living soul remained to till his lands. And so he proceeded, —and as Agapit continues obstinate, heaven knows what the end may be!”

“The villain! he but spares the castle for the sake of his wife’s kinship!” said Cæsar fiercely. “Had he slaughtered a hundred nobles I could sooner have forgiven it than the murder of these stalwart knaves! What is the use of these dead bodies to me!”

“The podestà is indeed a bloodthirsty butcher!” said Migueloto.

“He is indeed!” returned Cæsar, in a milder and somewhat regretful accent. “And I will be convinced of his treachery ere I deprive myself of so valuable a minister! Thy device is too violent, Migueloto mine!—neither imagine that I will make thee podestà in his room, for I need thee elsewhere, and mean to govern the poor people so that they shall take a singular love for me! But, saidst thou not that he carries on his traitorous correspondence with my enemies in Rome, by means of carrier-pigeons?”

Migueloto stretched his gaunt neck round, to observe that no one was near, and then replied, “Nay, my lord, I said—with his fair wife, Beatrice Colonna.”

“When thou hast informed Don Remiro that I desire him to keep the Orsino till he bears further from me, and that I have gone on secretly to Rome, if he be the traitor thou wouldest have me think him, he will send his pigeons with the news!” said Cæsar. “Now, when thou hast privily admitted me to the castle, I will sit and watch his doings in the tower of the winds, with my good hawk, Gorebee, that never failed, on my wrist! I trust that thou hast kept him well fleshed?”

Even Migueloto stared in astonishment at this subtle and strange device; but he had no time to offer objections, even if he intended any.

The report of a cannon suddenly awakened all the echoes of the lake, towards whose golden expanse they were now descending. The direction of the sound, and the smoke which arose on the still evening air, announced that the castle had caught sight of their approach, and was inclined to receive them with unusual honours. This opinion was confirmed when, at the entrance of a deep glen, the crags above which were crowned with an endless succession of towers and battlements, a group of persons appeared, as if assembled to await the arrival. Cæsar exchanged a few more words with his captain, and then, with one of his fantastic gambols, disappeared from the train.

Don Migueloto hastened on, and soon came up to the group in anxious expectation, which was composed of Spanish soldiers, like those of the escort, excepting one personage, who was mounted on a snow-white mule, and was attired in the black-furred mantle and cap of a doctor of laws, his rank of podestà marked only by a gold chain which hung to his feet. A lean and shrivelled body, a visage all over with the lines of thought and care, long hair prematurely grey, an expression sinister and troubled, a frown quivering with nervous emotion and restlessness, like a loadstone in the box, composed the personal attributes of the merciless administrator of the law.

Don Migueloto requested to speak with the podestà in private; and together they proceeded down the glen, until their figures were darkened under the shadows of the huge black rocks upon which the castle was built, and of the woods above; the brawl of a stream which fell through a distant archway in the walls, and rattled through the ravine, rendering their voices inaudible at a distance.

The podestà had undoubtedly been the dupe of the message brought on the previous night by the African runner; and he heard with surprise and alarm, which distorted his wiry features in the struggle to seem calm—that the duke had met Migueloto at Narni, in disguise, and directed him to proceed instantly to the rescue of the Lord Paolo. That his highness was not displeased with the obstacles the podestà had thrown in the way of that baron's destruction, traitor as he was, since he had heard the ill news from Milan, of which doubtless the podestà had been informed. But the duke still thought it expedient to have Signor Paolo detained until he found how matters stood in Rome, whither he had secretly hastened. He therefore ordered him to keep the Orsino at Ronciglione until he had news from himself at Rome; by fair means, if possible, but at all events to detain him.

CHAPTER XI.

FEUDAL GOVERNMENT.

"What is this world? what axen men to have?
Now with his love, now in the colde grave
Alone, withouten any compagnie."—CHAUCER.

The practised features of the judge resumed their equanimity during this oration; not that his inward trouble had at all abated, but the habit of dissimulation returned. Migueloto then calmly added that the duke had so contrived it, that one of his servants, disguised as a monk, had

revealed the place of the Orsino's confinement to some pilgrims, who had rescued him. This information somewhat appeased the doubts in the podestà's mind, and he replied with humility, that his supreme joy and duty were to obey his generous master. At the same time his eye fell with searching suspicion and uneasiness on the crafty features of his officer, whose hatred and ambition were probably more than guessed by him. But the rest of the cavalcade approached, and the escort halting, opened a pathway lined with spears for the advance of the personages whom they guarded.

The podestà returned, observing with surprise the number and quality of these leaders—but recognising the Orsino, he dismounted to receive him, a courtesy which the Roman baron instantly returned. They met accordingly on foot, and with all the formal ceremonial of the age, kissing each other on both cheeks. The podestà warmly congratulated the young baron on his escape from the banditti, who, he had heard with extreme grief and confusion, had ventured, even under his own immediate jurisdiction, to seize on his illustrious person, and put it to ransom!

“Let us not speak of that; our Black Bands have, in man's memory, assailed even the person of an emperor,” returned the baron. “But I am safe now, and under the friendly escort of my rescuers; and the way to Rome is not easily missed over the Campagna. Therefore, my lord podestà, but for my joy to see you in such excellent health, I am sorry you have brought me thus far to the west, and must make up for lost time by abridging the pleasure of this interview, for I mean to lodge to-night at Sutri or Nepi.”

“My lord, as you perceive by the length of the rays over the hills, it is nigh sunset,” replied the podestà in a resolved and even stern voice. “The road you speak of is through fen and forest and wastes: your horses are spent; so are those of my troopers; moreover, signor, I have no warrant to permit a lord, so well known to be in rebellion against the church, to proceed to Rome. Therefore, I must humbly implore and beseech your lordship to take up your lodging at Ronciglione, until I can obtain his Holiness's commands.”

“Mean you, sir podestà, that you will force me to delay thus on my road, bearing as I do the articles of a fair peace?” said the baron, passionately.

“I must do my duty, noble sir,” replied the podestà, with a look of much significance. “And the time will come when your lordship will see that I am, and have been, your truest friend.”

“And the husband of a Colonna!” exclaimed Paolo.

“The Colonnas love the Orsini little, but they love others less,” replied the podestà, slightly smiling at the pleasant recollection of his young wife.

“Our Holy Father himself invited me to Rome, and I will only enter these towers under sway of the strong hand!” replied the Orsino. “These my friends will stand by me!—and you shall perpetrate my murder under the gaze of Italy, which sees all you do through the eyes of yonder gentleman, the ambassador of Florence.”

“Health to the serene and magnificent signory,” said the podestà, uncovering and bending profoundly to the dignitary who represented them; and his gloomy visage cleared up wonderfully as he added, “I cannot but offer the same hospitality to your company, signor; and if it be true that you have his Holiness's invitation, why dread you the slight delay which is necessary to bring me the confirmation from Rome?”

"Promise then, sir podestà, that the Lord Paolo shall not be separated from us, his friends; and that when we depart from Ronciglione, he shall accompany us," said the Hospitaller.

To this proposal the magistrate assented with great readiness; and as in fact resistance was impossible, the travellers were fain to accept the slender guarantee which it tendered.

The unwilling guests now proceeded on the way up to the fortress-gates, Machiavelli smiling vaguely; for in truth he himself was uncertain as to what was to happen, but felt that it would be mischief. The immense extent and strength of the castle appeared more plainly as the windings of the crags in the ascent revealed its towers and battlements stretching remotely in every direction. It might almost be considered as a double castle: for above the first circles of Gothic fortifications arose a pile in the Saracenic style, and of a whiter stone, in the centre of which was a round tower of extraordinary height, which, being pierced with horse-shoe embrasures on every side, was popularly called the Tower of the Winds.

The interior of the castle, however, shadowed forth some of the great changes of the time; for, although preserving the warlike characteristics of a feudal castle in other particulars, traces of that magnificence and love of the arts which had arisen in Italy appeared even in the stronghold of the ferocious Borgia. The apartments allotted to the guests were furnished with great magnificence, perhaps with a barbarous profusion of gilding and ornament; and the great saloon, in which a repast was served shortly after their arrival, instead of being as usual hung with uncouth designs in arras, was painted in *fresco* by some masterhand. The vessels from which they were to eat and drink were of silver, and already forks of one prong were used in partaking of the viands.

The knights had refused to unarm, alleging that it was part of their pilgrim vow to remain in steel; but the canon was much comforted to observe that, although waited on by the soldiers of the castle, the English men-at-arms were served at a lower table in the same apartment. Gratified with this proof of the absence of any immediate treachery, the epicurean ecclesiastic watched with satisfaction the preparations for a noble banquet which began to load the tables. Some beakers of choice red wine had removed the sense of fatigue; and while Messer Bembo's good wit was cheered and sharpened by frequent encounters with that of the Florentine ambassador, his eye was charmed with the superb view which the saloon commanded. The lake of Vico lay almost immediately below in its woody amphitheatre, beyond which arose the distant snowy piles of the Ciminiian Alp. The forests which clothed the opposite hills were shot with the scarlet effulgence of the sunset, while the waters of the lake had subsided into deep sombre purple, excepting where the direct line of the sun crossed them in a column of wavering gold. The air was wooingly sweet and balmy, with the scent of odoriferous herbs and flowers; and the only animated objects which disturbed the Eden-like solitude were the snowy swans which glided majestically over the bosom of the lake.

At last the table seemed sufficiently furnished: wild boars roasted whole, noble haunches of venison, pasties whose vast walls inclosed every species of game, fish in profusion, and above all, an enormous roasted crane, composed the staple viands. Nought was wanting but the presence of the host himself, who had retired, said Captain Migueloto, to write some

despatches. The canon gazed hungrily and unpoetically at the table, and thence with a sigh to the lake. He was just remebering somewhat vaguely the beautiful legend which appertains to its waters, as well as to so many other European lakes—that a submerged city is frequently beheld by fishermen below its bright depths, when his attention was caught by observing a pigeon, with something white tied round its neck, dart from a tower above. The bird flew at first in a straight and steady line towards the south, but suddenly it whirled round, panting rather than flying with its wings and dived down to the lake.

Bembo's curiosity was excited, and looking upward, it was some moments before he discerned a hawk so high in the air that it looked little more than a black spot. But it was descending in its fatal gyrations, and as if aware of an inevitable doom, the pigeon, after a few vain flutterings, made a last despairing soar, and soon the rapacious claws were in its back, and the ruthless beak in its brain.

The canon had no time to notice what further befell the unhappy bird, for at this moment the much desired podestà made his appearance. He entered, but with so much agitation and anger visible in his countenance, that Bembo's alarms were all renewed. "Who is it, Migueloto, that presumes to fly the duke's hawks without my allowance?" he said, fiercely. "I have just lost one of my best carrier pigeons, which was seized by a hawk launched from the Tower of Winds, and the letter to my wife, which I despatched by it, is probably lost!"

"It is Ugccione. I have warned him many a time that he displeased your lordship," replied Don Migueloto. "But the hawks are too well trained to have eaten the pigeon; therefore undoubtedly the letter is safe."

"Go and bring the rogue this instant before me; and by heaven! if the seal is but breathed upon, I will have him hung up as a warning to all such insolent, meddling villains that keep no discipline," said the podestà, whose agitation was so extreme that Ser Niccolò inwardly smiled. Don Migueloto departed, apparently with very good will, on his errand; and striving to resume his equanimity, Remiro invited the guests to seat themselves. Some time elapsed, and although the podestà continued to be much disturbed, the guests did ample honour to their repast. The Orsino, for whatever reason, ate only of such meats as he saw were served to his host; but no one had as yet assailed the crane when the captain of Ronciglione made his re-appearance. His naturally insidious and at the same time ferocious countenance displayed its characteristics now so legibly, that a child could not have mistaken them. He held an open letter in his hand, which he presented to the podestà. "It was not the under-falconer, as I imagined, my lord," he said, with a satanic leer, "but a fellow that lately came to the castle, who has dared to amuse himself with flying the duke's hawks; and whom I surprised perusing your letter to Signora Donna Beatrice, your honourable wife!"

"My wife!—then—thou hast not—thou hast not read it too, Migueloto?" exclaimed the podestà, turning deadly pale as he received the epistle.

"Your lordship knows that I am as great a fool in monk-learning as a monk were in soldiery!" replied Migueloto.

"True—that thou hast often said!" observed the podestà, breathing hard, as if relieved from a weight on his chest. "But did not this prying villain read it to thee?"

"By the rood ! I gave him not the time !" replied the captain.

"What, my excellent, my faithful Migueloto ! thou didst not, in thy passion at his insolence, strike thy dagger into him ?" said Don Remiro, hurriedly.

"I caused him to be instantly seized—but I thought it behoved me rather to wait for your lordship's judgment," said the captain.

"Where have you left him ? In whose company ? Take him at once to the nearest tree !" said the podestà, with increasing agitation. "Doubtless he is some spy employed by our enemies—else wherefore should he read my letters ?"

"My lord, he is a freeman, and as such, according to the laws of that same Roman king you so often upbraid us with, he must be fairly adjudged ere he be put to death," replied the malicious captain, who enjoyed his superior's confusion.

"Let none speak to him. Bring him here gagged, and I will adjudge him fast enough," said Don Remiro, passionately.

"He is at the door—your lordship need not long delay your dinner," said Don Migueloto, stepping eagerly to the portal, which he threw widely open. The burnished casques and spears of the Florentine ambassador's escort suddenly glittered on the startled gaze of the banquetters, filing into the saloon in rapid succession, from the centre of whose opening ranks, with a rapid and fiery step, eyes blazing with wrath, his fine nostrils quivering, his cheek pale with concentrated passion, came Cæsar Borgia ! The suddenness of his entry, his wild looks, his dark hair waving like black serpents beneath his cap of white fur—even his garb, which was of sable velvet gleaming all over with gems—might have struck terror into men who had no reason to dread his wrath. As it was, Don Remiro stood fixed and pallid as stone—the knights started up and laid their hands on their swords, and the canon broke into the form of exorcism to a fiend.

"Ha, podestà ! you are determined then to send me to the gibbet for impertinence !—What then does treason merit ?" thundered the terrific master; and turning with a sudden change to the most courtly and blandishing kindness, he said, "Disturb not at this, noble gentlemen, and my dear friend and brother, Orsino !—But assist me to pronounce what punishment is due to this ungrateful traitor, who is not content with endeavouring to blow into a more furious flame than ever this civil war which we were all striving to extinguish, but desires to blacken my good name with the foulest treachery ; to raise not only Rome but all humanity against me, yea, even to set war, and hatred, and suspicion between a father and his child !"

As he spoke, he snatched the paper from the passive hand of the podestà, and read aloud the intercepted letter to his no less passive auditors.

The podestà had indeed been inspired by his evil genius when he penned this epistle. After a loving preamble to his fair wife, and intense regrets expressed at their long separation, Don Remiro cooingly declared that he believed the time of their mutual misery was drawing to a close. He then informed the lady of the arrival of Paolo Orsino and his company at Ronciglione; described the calamities he had suffered on the way ; and desired her immediately on the receipt of this letter to hasten to the Apostolic Palace, use the signal he had taught her to obtain a private audience of the Pope, and then to inform his holiness of the event; with the addition, that the podestà knew the whole to have been plotted by the Duke of Romagna

to murder his intended brother-in-law, and that unless speedy rescue arrived, the deed would still be accomplished! To prevent which, he advised that the Pope should send a nuncio, with his command to the podestà to bring the Orsino instantly to Rome; and lest the soldiery and seditious captain of Ronciglione should refuse obedience, he advised that the nuncio should be accompanied by the German ordnance and a muster of the Orsini, allowing them, by way of security, the guard of the Flaminian Gate, until their return. In a private postscript, the uxorious magistrate informed his wife, that as he could no longer live apart from her, and as the duke began to suspect his attachment to the service of his holiness, and was moreover more rapacious than a harpy, cruel than a tiger, and false than a serpent, he did not intend to return to his office, and therefore desired her to send three large carriages, with broad wheels, to convey away his treasures and effects, before the tyrant could arrive. Among the latter was a pearl chain, of the bigness of pigeon eggs, taken from a certain lady of Montefeltro, who was executed for blasphemously pretending to miraculous powers in foretelling events—anong which she had dared to include the podestà's approaching destruction,—which he hoped soon to see on the fairest neck in the world.

“Now gentlemen and true knights, deem you the lady of the pigeon-egg pearls ought to be mistaken?” said the Borgia, with a terrible laugh as he concluded reading the epistle.

“If Don Remiro has spoken the truth in this amorous overflow, wherefore would you punish him, Duke of Romagna?” said the Hospitaller, whether in desperation or defiance, he himself could scarcely have said. But instead of being irritated to madness, as the unhappy canon immediately expected to behold him, Cæsar’s fierce eyes suffused with tears, and he uttered, in a voice apparently choked with grief, touching laments over the severity of his fortune which exposed him to such undeserved suspicions. “You too, Paolo, you too, suspected me, else wherefore did you journey by stealth through my estates?” he said, with a pathetic look of reproach which almost deceived the Orsino himself. “But our blessed Mother be praised! I can give a noble answer to these calumnies of my enemies and traitors! Are you not here in my power, in my strong castle, which Orsini and German ordnance might vainly assail for years—surrounded by my devoted soldiery? Well!—to thee, Paolo, I offer the fullest and amplest confirmation of all the terms of the peace which we concluded at Imola,—to ail of you a friendly welcome, safe lodging and good cheer,—and to-morrow, with the dawn, we will all troop in company to Rome, where you shall share such honours as the too liberal state will needs heap upon me!”

He extended his hand at the same time with seeming enthusiasm to the Orsino, who looked at him for a moment in doubt, as he replied, “Do you then consent to cement our alliance in the way so oft proposed?—Say yes, Cæsar!—fulfil your promise of setting us free, and my doubts are gone for ever!”

“On that one point Donna Lucrezia herself must decide, and your own fortune in love,” replied the duke composedly.

“But you will no longer use your influence in favour of the Prince of Ferrara?” returned the Orsino, with lingering incredulity expressed in his every tone.

“Ha, ha, what say you, when the vain simpleton has crossed the Alps to shun an alliance which an emperor might rejoice in?” replied Cæsar,

with a momentary expression of mortified pride. “ But why keep we the privy councillor of our holy father standing?—away with him, Migueloto!”

“ Mercy, my lord, my master, my glorious and victorious prince!—mercy to a wretched criminal!” yelled the podestà, prostrating himself on the rushes strewed over the floor.

“ Mercy, merciless traitor!—what mercy didst thou show to the lady with the chain of pigeon-egg pearls?” replied Cæsar, spurning the wretched man with his foot as he endeavoured to clasp his knees. Migueloto darted forward and seized the podestà by his fur mantle, but Paolo Orsino now interposed. “ However falsely, treacherously, and ungratefully this man has behaved to you, Cæsar, still it is not for me to forget that he shewed a concern for my safety, though doubtless of a misjudging and selfish cast. Therefore, I pray you, do not at least inflict upon him—death!”

“ I would humbly propose, my lord, that he be delivered bound to the people whom he governed—to the wives and children of the serfs whom we found hanging on the green oaks above,” said Machiavelli, in a mild and interceding tone.

“ So let it be!” said Cæsar, joyously. “ And when they have done with him, saw me his carcass in twain, and set it up like a shark’s jaw in the market-place, to let the people know that I loved not nor approve his cruelties!”

At this terrific sentence, all vestiges of sense deserted the wretched magistrate, and he reeled back into the arms of Don Migueloto. It is probable that the recollection of the direful cruelties of the podestà, which they had so lately witnessed, somewhat cooled the zeal of the intercessors on his behalf. Moreover, Migueloto rushed upon his victim with the avidity of a wild beast, fearful lest its prey should be snatched from it, and hurried him out. But Messer Niccolò, when he found his advice, which was given rather in satirical bitterness than in earnestness, so fearfully taken, besought Cæsar to revoke his sentence. At first his entreaties produced no effect, but when he pointed out the danger of suffering the people to tear their tyrant to pieces, the duke consented that a messenger should be sent to countermand the order for the execution, and to convey the criminal to a dungeon beneath the castle. “ And there let him muse at his leisure on his wife’s fair neck, and the large pearls that are to deck it,” said the humourous tyrant; and throwing himself with a lofty air into the raised seat so lately occupied by the fallen podestà, he filled a goblet of wine to the brim, and with a smile which seemed full of joviality and heartiness, drank to the health of all his honoured guests, and of his dear brother, the Orsino, in particular.

CHAPTER XII.

A FEUDAL PEACE.

“ Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,
And cry, content, to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.”—SHAKESPEARE.

After this ceremonial it seemed as if, for the first time, that Cæsar noticed specifically the presence of the Florentine ambassador. He em-

braced him warmly. "In happy hour are we all met!" he said. "For now your magnificent lords may clearly learn how unfounded are their suspicions that my peace with the Orsini must needs include some harm to their states. Yourself shall witness the truth to them! Migueloto! where is he? Ah, true: let some one bring me my steel strong-box."

Half-a-dozen soldiers darted off immediately on this service, and returned with a massive chest, which the Hospitaller had some faint idea he had noticed among the baggage of Ser Niccolò. A vast parchment was produced, which Cæsar himself read in a loud and distinct, and at the same time musical voice. This document remains one of the most singular monuments of that tempestuous age. It provided for the restoration of the dispossessed barons to all their ancient powers and dominions, with such exceptions as the harmonious hatred of the contracting parties sometimes agreed upon. The Colonnas were of the number; but the multitude of the restored barons, their hard Gothic names barbarously Latinized, mark how feeble must have been the sovereignty which was to be acknowledged to the Holy See by these turbulent feudatories. Still it was a vast advantage, overlooked by the colleagues, which was bestowed on the church by their consent to a general surrender of all fiefs held by them under grants of the emperors, on condition that they should be instantly restored by the pontiff as his own. This stipulation conferred on the church all rights of suzerainty,—among the rest that of compelling them to serve it in arms, which the barons were content to concede, in the belief that their restored power would enable them to despise that of their new master. No other state of Italy was mentioned in the stipulations, either in a hostile or friendly spirit; so that none could apparently take umbrage.

"I am willing to these conditions—but, alas, I shall remain but a shadowy duke!" said Cæsar, with a quaint smile.

"Surely, my lords, there should be some hostage, some pledge for the due observance of this peace, which is else but scrawled deerskin!" said the Hospitaller, in his deep, austere tones; and fixing his gaze on Cæsar, he continued— "Since it appears that our holy father desires these nuptials, wherefore do ye not solemnly covenant to bind your loves in adamant by wedding the heir of the Orsini to the lady of the Borgias?"

"Will Messer Bembo, so fresh from Ferrara, put his hand to this good stipulation?" said Ser Niccolò, with evident alarm at the proposal. "Or will your highness bind yourself to exercise what may perchance prove a tyrannous control over that beauteous lady's likings?"

"The Lord Paolo had time while I was in France, I have heard, to prove her likings," replied Cæsar, with a piercing look at Paolo. "If, brother, thou canst truly aver that she showed thee any buddings of hope, I will do even as this warlike peace-maker would have us!"

The Orsino's countenance darkened, and in almost exact proportion that of Cæsar irradiated.

"I am not of those disloyal cavaliers who are wont to boast their lady's gentleness into her shame," he replied with a gloomy smile. "Let us leave that matter to time and fortune, and the warmth of a passion which might enforce a returning glow in the bosom of a statue moulded like St. Cyprian's in snow."

Cæsar made no reply, but snatched a pen from a vast leaden stand which one of the notaries attached to the podestà's train canie bearing in trembling humility. He was about to sign, when Don Migueloto re-entered with a

fiendish smile, which he vainly strove to conceal under a forced sadness of aspect. Glancing at his familiar's countenance, the duke observed, "My countermand arrived then too late?" and wrote his name in huge capitals.

"Signor, before he had reached the gates, a soldier, whose brother he once hanged, ripped him up with his dagger," replied Migueloto composedly.

"Then it will not hurt him to saw him in twain; so let it be done incontinently," replied the duke.

"It is done, my lord; 'tis astonishing how dexterous with the saw Zeid is!" said the captain.

"Ha! and what say the people?" continued Cæsar, calmly. "Have you set him up in the market-place?"

"The dead lion scares them; they have left their melons and olives to the care of the baskets, and the square is empty—but I saw some women creeping in again, so they will soon be as thick as the carrion-flies about it," said Migueloto, laughing at the ludicrous recollection of the flight of the peasants.

"Go and wash thine hands, Migueloto! Not that I mean thee for my cup-bearer," replied Cæsar. "And that minds me—where is Astor Mansfredi, whom I raised to that noble office at my last sojourn?"

"I shall find him, I warrant; he leaves his chamber but seldom, signor," said Don Migueloto, with his crafty leer.

"Then now let us give a loose to mirth and festivity," said Cæsar joyously. "Let the soldiers tap a butt of my noblest Sicilian; send couriers to Rome, announcing this excellent peace and our approach; also to the Vitelli and to Bologna; and in especial to my good friend, Giovanni Frangiani, of Fermo."

"Signor, you have not then heard of the chance that has befallen that ancient gentleman?" said the canon, timidly. "We heard it on our pilgrimage from Ferrara."

"Is he at last gone peaceably, as he hath lived, to his ancestors?" said Ser Niccolò.

"Nay, sirs, but he is foully and treacherously murdered by his sister's son, whom he brought up from an infant, and treated ever as his own!" said the Knight of St. John. "Under pretext of paying his uncle a loving visit during this latter truce, he introduced himself into Fermo, and slaughtered the good old man in the midst of a banquet which he gave to welcome him!"

"Oliverotto is a friend and ally of thine, Orsino, and a pupil of the Vitelli," observed Cæsar, demurely.

"Let him now apply himself to doing good to the commons, or I take it he will not long be sovereign in Fermo," said Ser Niccolò thoughtfully, ruminating as if studying in his prolific brain the means to support so direful an usurpation.

At this moment Don Migueloto made his re-appearance with a bustling retinue, bearing the materials for a much more sumptuous banquet than that which had been interrupted. Some of the men-at-arms bore a canopy of crimson and gold, under which the podestà was wont to administer justice, which they arranged as a state over their chieftain. Migueloto himself came leading, or rather dragging, a figure, whose woe-begone aspect immediately attracted the gaze of the canon. It was that of a youth scarcely eighteen years old, whose form and countenance had once been

of perfect beauty; but whose sunken eyes now glared with a mixture of idiocy and madness—despair, rage, and yet vacancy—inexpressibly affecting and terrible. He had obviously been dressed up hastily for exhibition, and his splendid garb hung about his wasted frame in bags; and yet it had exactly fitted that once Apollo-like form, when in the flush of youth and bravery he had defended during a year his inheritance of the city of Faenza against Cæsar Borgia. What had been his subsequent fate? Was it the misfortunes of his house and imprisonment only which had wrought this ruin?

“Jupiter himself has not a nobler cup-bearer than mine; and in truth I carried him away on the back of my eagles!” said the Borgia, who had not yet perceived the entry of his cup-bearer. “It pleases me to see the proud boy serve me, pouting and beautiful with disdain—for he forsooth would be a soldier, and mar his bright complexion in the sun! Why, Migueloto, what goblin is this?”

“It is the Lord Manfredi; but he hath been so closely pent up by the podestà’s orders, who fancied that he meant to escape!”—said Don Migueloto, when Cæsar interrupted him by exclaiming fiercely, “To escape!—how to escape, when I had promised to use my every effort to obtain his restoration and the grace of our holy father!”

“To escape—to join your highness in your warfare,” replied Migueloto, in confusion.

“Six months have wondrously changed him,” said Cæsar, gazing at his miserable victim, with perhaps a momentary feeling of remorse, for there was a touch of compassion in the tones which seemed to arouse some recollection and consciousness in the poor idiot. Tears began to flow fast from his hollow eyes, and he uttered a long piteous whine like the cry of a beaten hound.

“Remove him: let him be looked to—I will send mediciners from Rome!” said Cæsar. “But how comes it, Migueloto, that I see ne’er a face without a beard among you? There were some as smooth as peaches when I was last in Ronciglione.”

“He that is in halves now made short work among them one morning, my lord,” replied Migueloto, grimly smiling. “He had his fits of justice, as he called it; but let us not speak evil of the dead! Nevertheless, if your grace pleases, I will take a dozen spears, and bring you a few of the prettiest girls in the market-place. They are not all baked brown.”

“If any violence be intended to women, Duke Cæsar, it is both in my rule of knighthood and religion—to baffle him to death who dares to offer it!” said the Hospitaller, rising and directing his fierce gaze on Migueloto, as he elasped the hilt of his heavy sword.

“Peace to your valour, sir knight! but I also am of the noble order of chivalry, by the hand of a king,—therefore am equally bound to protect the weak—and what is weaker than woman?” said Cæsar, smiling with bitter irony, and playing at the same time with the golden doves of an order which he wore on his neck. He then made a sign to Migueloto, who immediately retired with the young Manfredi.

During the revelry which ensued, the Hospitaller alone continued gloomy and silent, scarcely mingling at all in the dialogue, or partaking of the viands. The impression of the tragical scenes they had lately witnessed seemed not to wear so soon from his mind as from the joyous and free-hearted Englishman’s, or so subtly to be concealed as by the other Italians. But Cæsar’s manner had in it something of fascination,

when he chose to exert the fine qualities of intellect which he had so fearfully abused. The broad jest for one—for another the refined, voluptuous, or brilliant thought—the play of fancy or wit—enthusiasm, or its withering enemy, ridicule—all moods of the human mind seemed equally within the compass of the strangely Protean powers of the man. Time passed rapidly, and the night was far advanced ere Migueloto ventured to suggest, that as the duke and his guest intended to proceed to Rome on the following morning, it would be expedient to take some repose. The Orsino's countenance slightly paled at the proposal, which the keen eye of his host observed, for he said with his peculiar smile—“Tis not my intent to break any article of our late podestà's stipulations; we are all soldiers, and if heather couches are not too voluptuous for you, we will have them strewed in this chamber, so that your men-at-arms may sleep around us!”

The Orsino affected to accept this offer as dictated by convenience; and the lodging was so arranged. Some half-naked slaves, seamed with many a mark of lash and blow, brought in the bundles of sweet-scented heather, which they placed along the walls, one for each man. The only distinction consisted in the leaders having each a covering of bear-skins. But all commentary on the events of the day among our travellers was effectually prevented by Cæsar's apparently generous and trusting resolution to sleep with them in the saloon.

CHAPTER XIII.

“The truth!—what is the truth?”
Dying words of Anne Hyde, Duchess of York.

“—clari soboles Lucretia Borgiae,
Pulchro ore, et pulchris æquantem moribus aut quas
Verax fama refert, aut quas sibi fabula finxit.”—ARIOSTO.

Lucretia Borgia! equalling in beauty the most famous of antiquity; in virtues all that truth reports, or story has feigned.

After a night even more restless than the preceding one to the Orsino, the longed-for light came at last. Mass was sung—a stupendous breakfast despatched—and as Cæsar was now undoubtedly as anxious as his guests to proceed, no time was lost in getting to the saddle; and while the morning was still in its earliest blush, the little army passed out of Ronciglione. It was now much increased by a part of the garrison, under the command of Don Migueloto, and by continual accessions which met them, as if by appointment, on their line of advance. The majority of the latter consisted of inferior barons with their vassals, feudatories of the Hody See, but there were also several large bodies of German cavalry. Altogether the array began to assume a very formidable appearance. Cæsar was so much occupied in receiving these chieftains, and listening to the intelligence they brought, that his guests had frequent opportunities of conversing with each other. Le Beaufort, with the frank generosity of his character, already began to entertain a more favourable opinion of the duke, and he laughed at a suspicion which it seemed Paolo had imbibed—that the zany, their late companion, who had mysteriously disappeared, was Cæsar Borgia himself! It is true that he but hinted

this fancy, and strove to throw an air of incredulity into his words ; but the canon and the Knight of St. John seemed to be of his opinion. The former tremulously endeavoured to recollect all that he had said and done in the Carthusian monastery ; while Paolo laboured to convince himself that Cæsar could not have been in the plot against him, since it was improbable that he would quietly look on to see it frustrated.

They were now traversing the vast plain of the Campagna, then as in our own times, but from a different cause, a desert of reedy grass, marshes, and forests, through which wound the sluggish Tiber. Not a trace of human habitation appeared. A few tombs and ruined columns still marked the line of the Flaminian way, else every vestige of a road had vanished.

Strong as was his escort, Cæsar quitted the direct line over the Campagna, under some pretext that the castellan of Monterosi, beneath whose walls they must have passed, was of the Colonna faction. They accordingly left Nepi to the right, and plunged into a forest of seemingly boundless extent, and of an antiquity which vied with the oldest monuments of Italy. The noonday heat, which was extreme in the open plain, was agreeably tempered by the shadows of the enormous oaks of which the forest was chiefly composed, and by the dampness arising from the numerous swamps in its recesses.

Traversing this leafy wilderness, a sudden opening in the forest revealed a watery waste of black mud, dotted with islands of rank verdure, which stretched far towards the Lake of Bracciano. A herd of buffaloes, grazing as their wont is at some distance from each other, or wallowing in the foul marsh, were the only animated objects visible. Whether these animals were wild, and as such the prey of all who dared attempt their destruction, or were the property of some one of his numerous enemies, or that he needed their carcasses to feed his array, we know not, but Cæsar gave orders that some of the herd should be surrounded and destroyed. To effect this purpose, a body of spearmen was despatched to the skirt of the marsh, who with shouts and the goadings of their weapons were to drive the herd towards the forest, where the duke with a chosen squadron of mounted archers awaited their approach to overwhelm them with javelins and arrows. The ferocity and prodigious strength of the animals made the first part of this enterprise full of danger, and for that reason Sir Reginald insisted on accompanying the spearmen. The Knight of St. John took apparently but little interest in the matter ; but as it seemed, rather than remain with Cæsar in the forest, he followed at a leisurely pace the march of the spearmen.

To conceal their approach from the herd, the hunters took a circuit into the wood which skirted the marsh ; and it was in following their hoof-tracks that the Hospitaller lighted on a scene which so strongly attracted his notice, that he halted to gaze upon it. He reached a point at which the forest descended into one of those deep ravines from which arise the rocks on which most of the towns of the Campagna are built. A city picturesquely built on the brow of the opposite hill, surrounded by walls, and crowned with a strong castle, appeared in some remoteness. The country around was richly cultivated, the mountain being completely covered with vines and olives, and the plain waving with corn or verdant pastures, on which fed white steers and numerous flocks of sheep. Ceres indeed seemed to have shaken her horn empty over this fortunate site, and there was such an air of pastoral tranquillity and

security brooding over all, that the Hospitaller knew not how to account for such an oasis in the devastated territory.

He concluded, in his musing survey, that the land belonged to some monastery, the sanctity of which protected its possessions from spoliation ; more especially as he remarked, in the ravine below, a scene of a very ecclesiastical character. From its groves of cypresses and pines arose the airy shafts of a Gothic shrine placed over a fountain, and surmounted by a cross, with a figure of the Virgin kneeling and embracing it in agony, while some saint in the garb of a monk offered consolation by pointing upward. The waters of the fountain flowed from lion's heads at the top of some circular steps, on the highest of which stood a Dominican monk, preaching, apparently with great fervour, to a crowd of listeners below. Numerous groups of peasants in wild, but gaily-tinted garbs, stood or knelt around the shrine, their bronze countenances glowing with agitation and religious zeal. Many pilgrims, known by bearing the rosemary branch, were among them, and two or three soldiers were visible among the trees.

But the principal group was undoubtedly around a lady who seemed to be of high rank, for she sat in a gilded chair opposite the preacher, while several ecclesiastics, whose gorgeous robes proclaimed them to be the chapter of a cathedral, with a bishop at their head, stood around. A number of richly attired ladies were also standing, and a litter of purple silk, borne on gilded poles by slaves, might be observed at some distance. Even at the height where he was placed, the Hospitaller could not but remark the queenly grace with which the lady sat, and his curiosity was kindled when he remarked, that with all these attributes of grandeur around her, she wore a robe of the coarsest sackcloth, but which could not altogether hide the beauty of her form. Her feet were naked, and their sculpturesque whiteness was displayed on the coarse rug of black wool beneath them. The long tresses of her golden hair were unbound, and flowed down to her waist in silky waves, and with the hand on which she leaned in penitential humility, nearly concealed her face.

This apparition was the more extraordinary, as the shrine appeared to be decked out for a festival, every fret and pinnacle of the elaborate masonry being hung with garlands of flowers. So deeply did it excite the curiosity of the religious knight, that observing an uneven path before him, which descended to the ravine, he followed it some little way, when a crashing noise mingled with shouts induced him to turn his head. He beheld an enormous black buffalo bull, with its tufted tail high in the air, as if stung to madness by gadflies, come rushing down the steep, pursued by Sir Reginald at full gallop, who was laughing and shouting in the hilarity of the chase. But he was certainly ignorant that the whole herd was on his rear, frantically following the flight of their leader, and urged on by the spearmen, who rode after them in the hope of turning their career. The Hospitaller perceived at a glance the destruction which must ensue among the defenceless multitude below, if the herd arrived while they were thus absorbed. He therefore set spurs to his horse, and galloped down the declivity, shouting “Buffaloes, buffaloes !” at the pitch of his powerful voice. A direful uproar instantly arose, more especially as, unable to check his horse on its reaching the ravine, the armed phantom dashed round the shrine, and left in full view the approach of the terrific and maddened brute. The peasants, yelling distractedly, rushed away in every direction, falling over one another in their flight ;

pilgrims, slaves, and priests fled alike confusedly—all save the monk who had been preaching. When the Hospitaller brought his horse round, he perceived that the unarmed friar had rushed before the chair, from which the lady in sackcloth had risen, but had not fled, for there she stood, calling alternately to the Virgin, and on her fugitive vassals for protection, perfectly pale, but as if disdaining to share their cowardly flight. To perceive that the buffalo was rushing full tilt on the lady, that only the gaunt figure of the friar stood between her and destruction, and to dash forward with his mighty war-steed between them and the furious beast, were almost simultaneous actions with the chivalrous Hospitaller.

The buffalo was of prodigious size and strength—an African bull of the largest species, covered with black shaggy hair, its vast forehead so broad that its curled horns, which might separately have measured ten feet, could not compass it; its neck of amazing bulk; its small red eyes whirling in eddies of fire; its nose to the ground; its whole enormous strength concentrated like a battering ram, and increased by its wild velocity;—such was the assailant to which the Knight of St. John opposed himself and steed—not indeed with the insane purpose of receiving its shock, for swerving his shrilling horse with the dexterity which the practice of the bull-fight had made habitual to the Italian nobles, the Hospitaller seized the lightning instant when it rushed past, and struck one mighty blow with his axe, at the point where the spine enters the brain. The buffalo's career came to an instantaneous stop—he reeled, and simultaneously his vast flank was pierced by Sir Reginald's spear, who arrived with such headlong impetuosity that the weapon shivered to pieces, and he himself was tossed far over the buffalo's back. But the spear pierced the beast's entrails, and with a roar of anguish which seemed to shake the ground, and tossing torrents of his black blood around him, the wretched animal fell with all his monstrous carcass, and rolled over on his back in the agonies of death. The herd that followed, dismayed at the sound, suddenly paused, and then seized with panic, turned on their pursuers. Sir Reginald sprang up but little hurt by his fall, and flew to assist his brother-in-arms. But he found him dismounted, and hastening with his hands full of water to the assistance of the lady, whom the Dominican had borne in his arms, chair and all, up the steps of the shrine—where she lay insensible.

The monk knelt supporting her in his arms, and vainly chafing her brows; but even in that moment of terror and suffering, pale and colourless as marble, the Knight of St. John was struck with a feeling of astonishment at the extraordinary beauty of the lady's form. Her sack-cloth robe, deranged in the confusion, displayed it but too liberally, and the voluptuous roundness of the outlines, and the snowy fairness of the complexion, struck the Hospitaller's imagination with a splendid though vague vision, as if he were playing Prometheus to a statue of Venus. Throwing aside his hood, he hung over the beautiful form, absorbed as intensely in his efforts to revive her, as if in reality, like the sculptor demigod, he were kindling marble into life with the stolen fire. The monk zealously aided, and Sir Reginald threw himself on horseback to hasten in quest of the canon, who possessed more skill in the medical art.

And like the vivification of the love-hewn Grecian statue was the return of life to the form of the beauteous penitent. A pale pinkness gradually crept over the snowy paleness, like flame on marble,—deepened to rose

on the cheeks,—to coral on the lips: the large humid warm blue eyes, with their long silken lashes, opened, and the return of sensation to the soul was feinely marked by the flush which deepened all those lovely tints when she pereceived the dark warrior countenance bending over her, and met a gaze whose natural severity was softened into almost feminine tenderness. She drew her coarse robe around her neck with the gesture of a nymph of Diana surprised when bathing, and murmuring some incoherent words of gratitude, which yet sounded like babblings of the sweetest music, she raised herself feebly in the arms of the Dominican. Gazing then for an instant at the monstrous beast, which lay wallowing in a pool of its own gore, she shuddered convulsively, and turning to the knight with such a look of admiration and passionate gratitude that it seemed to kindle fire in his breast, she said, “Signor, are you hurt!” in a tone which shewed that her anxiety was altogether transferred from herself to him.

“In no wise, noble lady, save in my apprehension lest humanity should lose its masterpiece of beauty!” replied the Hospitaller, who, it seemed, could be gallant when it pleased him.

“And my poor vassals!—and the good bishop with his retinue?” she continued, with a faint smile, turning to the monk.

“They left you, daughter, to your fate, and you may well leave them to theirs!—yet all are safe,” replied the monk. “But get you to your litter, for here come a multitude of I know not who—but such as should not see you in this guise, though it be in performance of a holy and necessary penance.”

Blushing still more deeply, the lady seated herself in the chair, while the Dominican hurried down among the people, who now began to return from their panic, armed with staves and stones, ordering them to raise the litter, which its bearers had thrown on the ground. But he returned with surprising rapidity, bringing a rich mantle which it seemed belonged to the lady, and which he had scarcely time to throw over her penitential garb, ere a multitude of men-at-arms descended the ravine at a gallop. Among these were Cæsar, Paolo, the Florentine ambassador, and the canon, dragged at a distressing jolt on his mule by Le Beaufort.

It seemed as if this military avalanche infused some new and excessive terror into the lady’s mind. She started up with a glance full of fear and suspicion even at her rescuer; but her strength was exhausted, and she must have fallen had not the Hospitaller put his steely arm around her waist, and held her up. Thus supported, and gazing up with a look of supplication to the stalwart warrior, and with the mingled expression of delight and protection with which he returned it, the imagination of the hearers readily assented to Messer Bembo’s outburst as he approached—“Mars and Venus!” But ere the canon could dismount to tender his services, Cæsar had leaped from his steed, flew up the steps, and exclaimed, with a wild face of alarm, “Lucrezia! my sister! my dearest sister! thou art not hurt?”

As Cæsar pronounced the fatal name, as his bright eyes blazed upon the lady and from her to the Hospitaller, a vortex of emotions whirling in them,—the knight literally tore away his supporting arm, and started a wide pace from her. The lady glanced at him with profound astonishment, grew very pale, and then the blood returned in crimson, not only to her brow, but to her whole frame, for even the white feet became suffused. The expression of intense horror, loathing, and even of fear which,

however momentarily, painted itself on that noble and severe countenance, could not be mistaken. After a moment of startled wonder, a crowd of thoughts seemed to rush upon Lucrezia; her own beautiful features flushed at once and sparkled all over with mingled emotions; but the whiteness came again, and she sank down in her chair, as if relapsing into the swoon.

All pressed eagerly around with assistance, excepting the Hospitaller; but Cæsar sternly commanded that none should mount the steps save the canon, who came rubbing a rosemary branch, discarded by some fugitive pilgrim, in his hands, and applied the strong scent to revive the lady. The effect indeed soon followed, for she had not fainted, and stretching her hand to the monk, she murmured in a low voice, “Father, let me be gone! I am not well here.”

“Dost thou not know me, Lucrezia! I am thy brother, Cæsar!” said the duke, in a tone of crouching humility very unusual in his voice.

“Cæsar!—my brother!—yes, truly,” she replied, starting up without assistance, and with a degree of wildness. “Welcome, our brother!—My lord, I am well, very well,—in nowise injured,—what do you all here, you and your soldiers?—Know you, sirs, that you break my charter from the holy father, in Rome, by your presence here? Wherefore are our peaceful festivals thus disturbed by armed men!”

“Fear nothing, daughter; all is well!—Remember yourself!—The duke is here by chance; these soldiers are your brother’s, lady!” said the Dominican.

“Pardon me; I am foolish with fear!” replied the lady, melting into a gush of tears, and adding, with an hysterick smile, “Oh, no, no, no, we cannot fear any offence to our new seigneurie from our brother. Welcome, signor, very welcome home from your victories.”

“In faith, you send so few tidings of your doings about Rome, that I pray you, my fair sister, how was I to know that I was hunting on your lands, being at Nepi?” said Cæsar with his usual affectation of careless good humour. “But here is one with me who I know will find a warmer ‘God save ye!’—my Lord Paolo Orsino.”

He turned, and with a slight and almost contemptuous gesture, indicated the presence of the young Roman baron, who, pale and quivering with emotion, ascended some of the steps, and knelt before the lady.

“Signor!—Cæsar, this is not kind,” said Lucrezia, with an angry glance, and coldly extending her hand, which the Orsino passionately kissed. “I am in no condition to receive such a court; and craving all your fair allowance, I will to Nepi, whither I grieve that I cannot invite your armed company, my lord, for the town hath certain privileges granted by the Holy See, on condition that it denies all entry to any soldiers but those belonging to its lords.”

“Yet first, noble lady, pardon the unwitting cause of this disaster, who would a thousand times rather have perilled his own life than so peerless a princess’s!” said Le Beaufort, with enthusiastic warmth, and kneeling on the lowest step of the shrine.

“Tis granted ere asked,—and indeed we think you perilled your own safety for ours, as well as this valiant gentleman, sir tramontane!” replied the lady, resuming a dignity which seemed natural to her, and with a flashing glance at the Hospitaller. “But like a truly generous giver, it seems as if he has already forgotten what he has bestowed.”

“Thank chance, lady, and not its blind instrument,” said the Hospitaller,

with calm austerity. “Even this holy man hazarded himself without arms in your defence!—But if any merit there be, let it go to the advantage of the Lord Orsino, your sworn servant and knight, whose will would have hazarded all for you, whereas it was rather my necessity than choice which put me on the service which you deign to thank.”

“Nay my lord!—illustrious lady!—methinks the true knight is he that doth the service of one!” said the canon, who had been gazing in an ecstasy of admiration at the too famous beauty. “Wherefore I deem there is none worthier here to be the eagle of your sun of loveliness than this valiant and approved champion of the buffalo, who is also my dear friend, and a most noble gentleman of Ferrara.”

Again Lucrezia glanced at the knight with an expression of half pride, half supplication, but marvellously beautiful in its effulgence of struggling emotions, which pouted the lips with haughtiness, and at the same time moistened the fire in the eyes as if with tears.

“You mark not my habit, messer canon,” replied the Hospitaller, with increased sternness. “I am no less monk than knight,—the soldier of Christ, whose service I may not profane with any earthly admixture,—for if this lady be not celestial, as her beauty would declare her,—what else are we to deem her?”

“Wert thou the Blue Eagle of Este himself turned monk, 'tis too friarly spoken,” said Ser Niccolò, attentively surveying the knight's countenance, and in allusion to the heraldic bearings of the Dukes of Ferrara.

“Machiavello! best wit of Italy! thou art indeed welcome!” said Lucrezia, with sudden animation, as the Florentine made his way up to kiss the hand which she joyfully extended to greet him. The deep melancholy voice of the Dominican was heard at this instant. “Daughter! it was no part of thy penance to be the gaze of this courtly presence in these sad weeds,” he said. “The litter is prepared, and your guards are in readiness.” Many eyes turned towards the monk as he spoke, for although his words were sufficiently common-place, there was a strange ring of warning and even menace in his tones which excited a vague echo in every heart. The composed and majestic countenance, nevertheless, offered some satisfaction to curiosity. It was one which a painter might have taken as a study for St. Paul's, but for its maceration and gloom—St. Paul converted after a life of warlike broils and violent passions.

“But we shall meet again, all, in Rome, where our holy father will thank you, knight, for a life which he values beyond its worth,” said Lucrezia, with a beseeching look, and a wavering, wooing smile which it seemed impossible to resist. The Hospitaller only replied with a stiff bend; and the blush which again dyed her fair skin was rendered more glowingly beautiful by the mixture of anger with shame—a rush of rosy light. She hastened down the steps to the litter, which some soldiers now carried, and who presented a still more novel variety in the genus military than all which our travellers had yet encountered. They were Greeks, from the coast of the Morea opposite to Italy, lightly armed in cuirass of mail, with javelins and cross-bows, and riding small, wild-looking horses, rather adapted for flight than to engage in conflict with the massive cavalry of the age.

Cæsar advanced to offer his assistance to his sister in ascending the litter, but seeming as if she did not notice his gesture she gave her hand to Ser Niccolò, who eagerly accepted the honour. It appeared as if she were about to go without any ceremony of farewell, but suddenly remem-

bering herself, she turned and bent to the chief personages of the group with the grace and majesty of the fair goddess whose other attributes were so lavishly bestowed on her.

But amidst all those plumed and helmeted heads bending in homage, her eye sought only the stately figure of the Hospitaller, and rested on it but for a flash of thought. She then entered the litter, which the soldiers at the monk's signal set in motion, and followed by such attendance as had rallied of her scattered retinue, departed. In a few moments the principal evidence of the interrupted festival which remained, were the bleeding buffalo and the garlanded shrine.

"Whew!—this is scant courtesy, brother-in-law!" said Cæsar, slapping Paolo on the back, who stood as if in profound reverie. "By the cross-keys! you should be thankful that our brother-in-arms here is as good a monk as knight, or he were like to prove a dangerous rival."

The Orsino smiled absently, but his eye fell with a somewhat fierce expression on the Knight of St. John. No further words passed, until the cavaliers had remounted; and leaving the buffalo herd to roam unmolested, the whole array once more resumed their passage through the forest.

It was remarkable that Sir Reginald, usually so buoyant and boisterous, continued long silent, and lost in thought. On the contrary, the Hospitaller for the first time began to speak much and hurriedly, as if to silence some importunate inner thought. For the first time he entered into conversation with Cæsar, and seemed to take pleasure in the loud gaiety of the remarks which the duke made on the past adventure, which he compared to the achievements of the ancients paladins, to whom the destruction of the most prodigious monsters was a daily and facile amusement. But when Messer Bempo burst almost into poetry, and somewhat licentious poetry, too, in praise of the excessive beauty of the lady, when Ser Niccolò joined in with his bitter and double-meaning praise, the knight relapsed into his austere silence. From this repose he was at length aroused by an observation of the Orsino, which had little connexion with the canon's rhapsodies. "Did you note the Dominican monk, reverend brother?" he said. "Resembled he in aught the wandering friar who set you on my luckless traces?"

"We saw not his visage; but his hollow voice and stature even now suggested the thought to me," said the Knight of St. John, with a profound sigh.

"Then, Cæsar, methinks I may claim some little interest in Donna Lucrezia's regard, since I cannot but think it was her confessor who met and warned me of my danger in crossing the Apennines!" said Paolo, brightening from his habitual gloom.

"And finding you despised the warning, did my sister also set the banditti to teach you less incredulity, brother Paolo?" said Cæsar, with a tart laugh and a frown, which he almost instantly ruffled away into a smiling expression. "Nay, let Saint Guidobald's ghost keep his honours, for it were to suppose the good confessor either a notorious rogue or fool to thus weave and ravel his own designs. Search into the mystery no farther, or you may light on some such fancy as that my sister sent her confessor to warn you—in order that you might keep your distance!"

Sir Reginald laughed at this suggestion, but without his usual light-hearted peal.

The forests around Nepi gradually thinned, and the cavalcade once

more appeared on the open campagna, on which the sun poured the full fervour of his beams until the earth itself seemed to beat up light. But there was no refuge from the heat in that vast plain, which spread on every side with the broad sterility of an African desert. Half blinded and involved in clouds of dust, which glittered like powdered gold high above their heads, they proceeded, Cæsar now lingering in the rear. But suddenly Don Migueloto rode up to the army and ordered a general halt. He gave no explanation of his reasons, and the cause was only declared when the approaching gleam of banners and lances on their rear announced the approach of some unexpected body of armed men.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROME !

*“ She who was named Eternal, and arrayed
Her warriors but to conquer—she who veiled
Earth with her haughty shadow, and displayed,
Until the o'ercanopied horizon failed,
Her rushing wings—Oh! she who was Almighty hailed.”*

The place of the halt was on the summit of a hill, whence the distant walls of Rome, set with numerous towers, were visible, rising abruptly in the plain. A black volcanic waste spread around, diversified only by stagnant ponds, which exhaled a sulphureous stench, or by a solitary pine, standing like a mourner in the desolation.

Wheeling their horses round, our travellers scanned with anxiety the approaching troop; but as the halt of Cæsar's array compelled his masses to spread out, their followers halted too, as if for the first time perceiving that they were coming on so powerful a body. After a few moments standing at gaze, Cæsar commanded Migueloto to tie a white banderol to his lance, and advance to demand, in his name, who the new comers were, and their business in the Comarca of Rome. But ere the order was given, a figure arrayed in the many-coloured garb of a herald, with a silver wand in his hand, emerged from the opposite ranks, and ascended the intervening hill with the calm assurance befitting his office. Cæsar dashed forward impatiently to meet him, and the herald immediately knelt, uncovered his head, and pronounced in a loud tone—“ Potent lord! or whoever you may be,—my master and sender, Vitellozzo Vitelli, Lord of Città di Castello, a devout pilgrim to the holy jubilee, availing himself of the safe conduct offered to all men alike by our holy father,—would know to whom he sends his peaceful greeting by me, that no blame may attach to him if it should turn out that ye are otherwise inclined.”

To very few of the hearers was this message pleasing, for Vitellozzo was chief of the powerful family of the Vitelli, whose immense possessions *out of* Rome rendered them the most formidable *in it*, of all the rebellious feudatories of the Holy See. In the league formed against the pretensions of Alexander VI., the Vitelli had been the strongest link, for in addition to the common motive of the barons, in resisting the efforts to crush their power, the Vitelli were united to the Orsini by the ties of blood, and consequently to the banished Medici of Florence. To the cause of the latter they were farther bound by the revenge which their chieftain cherished against the

Florentines for the death of his brother, who, commanding his mercenaries in their service, was beheaded by them for some real or supposed treason. Vitellozzo's German horsemen had principally caused the defeat of the papal forces in the pitched field of Bracciano, and since then his pride and arrogance had swelled to such a degree that he was said to project the expelling of Alexander himself from the chair of St. Peter.

Such was the devotee, who, surrounded by nearly a thousand horsemen, whose ponderous figures and complete panoply attested their genealogy from the ancient ravagers of Italy, appeared on his way to join in the celebration of the great feast of Christianity.

Whatever might have been the feelings with which Cæsar listened to the herald's announcement, after scarcely a moment's thought, he replied in a tone of delight, "Signor Paolo, hear you?—our good fortune is at its height now, and our peace will indeed be written in adamant, if the noble Vitelli sign it—at least seal it—for it remembers me the Lord of Città di Castello boasts he cannot write. But why comes he with all this array of arms to a Christian rite of peace?"

"Leave me to inquire that, my lord, and to settle the terms of fellowship and brotherhood between ye!" said the Orsino with great eagerness.

"Fellowship and brotherhood!—the Vitelli are vassals of the church—I am its lieutenant!" said Cæsar, with a momentary flash of his natural haughtiness; but as his experienced eye again perused the massive squadrons below, the smile returned to his lips. "Go then, dear brother, that shall be; but let not your conference be long, or the sun will melt away my men in their armour."

"Lead on, herald," said the Orsino, and with a significant glance of triumph at Sir Reginald, he followed the parti-coloured messenger towards the troops of his friend.

"I know not well what to think of this!" said Cæsar to Migneloto, who stood beside him, and in that tone scarcely above a whisper, which habit only enabled the captain to hear distinctly. "We have the vantage of numbers, but I doubt if we could bide the shock of yonder sandy-locked barbarians? Moreover, it were not perchance without its use, that his holiness should comprehend that, however maligned, we are yet of some service to his state. And the Florentines may learn, too, that our friendship is at least the frost which keeps this torrent from rushing down upon them?"

As he spoke Ser Niccolò approached. "My lord duke," he said, with a sarcastic and yet indignant expression, "Well may you call your power a child's bauble if you suffer this army of your enemies to join the insurgent Orsini and the other barons in Rome!"

"Hush, my dear master!—What can I do?—The time may come—*shall* come!" replied Cæsar. "'Tis not by force that men slay the rushing bull! And see you not yonder cuirassiers are savages from the Elbe and Danube?—If these troops of mine were overthrown, then indeed might Vitellozzo march on Rome, and dethrone our holy father (Heaven forbid!) in the presence of the whole Christian world!"

"The pilgrims would by no means suffer it!—They come from remote lands, and know no reason which could justify treason against Heaven in the person of its earthly lieutenant!" replied Machiavelli, with a smile, and then a sigh, which seemed to acknowledge the wisdom of the duke's fears.

"Trust me, master, I will only yield as a wave that flows away until it is high enough to overwhelm," returned the Borgia.

"Sinewy slaves, indeed!" continued Ser Niccolò, surveying the German riders. "But why levy you not a band in England, where the men are yet bigger, and so staunch and fiery, that they beat the French against as fearful odds as the French beat us?"

"I have thought of that—but they are a people so fierce and unruly that their own kings cannot govern them," replied Cæsar. "But, lo, our peacemaker—our lovesick peacemaker—seems to succeed, for here comes the giant himself in his company."

"I marvel he breaks not the back even of that antediluvian steed!" said Ser Niccolò, with the scorn of mind for matter, when the vast form of Vitellozzo emerged from his ranks, on a white steed of suitable bulk. Telamonian Ajax himself would scarcely have contended with such a figure even for the arms of Achilles, so vast and portentous showed the chieftain, who was nearly seven feet high, of proportionable bulk, mounted on a prodigious steed, which, like himself, was encased in massive armour, and with a lofty black plume waving over his helmet, which indeed seemed more like an iron barrel than the receptacle of a human head. To this immense stature, so unusual among the Italians, Vitellozzo owed great part of his fame and the singular fidelity which his barbarians preserved rather to his bulk than to himself, although indeed there were few chieftains whose riches and ferocity entitled them more to the esteem of the mercenary soldier.

Vitellozzo advanced with the Orsino, followed only by two spearmen, about a bow-shot beyond his cuirassiers; but suddenly he paused, and his loud voice could be heard even to the distance at which the Borgia stood, exclaiming, "No, by St. Paul, I'll venture no nearer to his nets till I have better assurance how far they are spread!"

Poalo seemed then to speak in a deprecating tone; but Cæsar, with his usual promptitude, desired Migueloto to keep his array at a stand, set spurs to his horse, and descended alone to meet his suspicious visitor.

This act of apparent confidence did more to win Vitellozzo than all the rhetoric of the Orsino. His large visage, which had settled into an obstinate and bull-like lower, became electrified as if with surprise, and brightened up, while his thoughts passed like gloomy clouds over it, in a manner which showed that he possessed but little of the art of concealing them.

"Your grace is nobly welcome!—Body of me! alone?" exclaimed he, staring for a moment as if incredulously, and then looking round at his lancers with a strange expression of alarm.

"I never trust—half—Vitellozzo!" replied the duke. "But methinks you have shown but little confidence in our holy father's pledge, since you travel to the jubilee with a thousand spears!"

"Our holy father has only promised to protect those who cannot protect themselves," replied the lord of Castello, recovering his natural fierceness and insolence of manner. "Moreover, we had heard only that our dear friend, Paolo, had been seized on his way by brigands—not that he was rescued! And to conclude, we would give our rogues a share in the indulgences of this blessed time—for, God's faith! they need it."

"But now that I have declared the terms of our agreement, and the valiant Vitellozzo assents to them, his force but adds to yours, Cæsar?" interposed the Orsino.

"So be it!" replied the duke, with a courteous bend, and affecting not to notice the expression of irresolute doubt on the baron's face,

which exhibited its meanings on too large a scale to be easily mistaken.

Muttering something incoherently, Vitellozzo at length concluded with,—"But we hear you have the ambassador of the Florentine rabble with you ; and I have with me their banished prince—Pier de Medici!"

This information did indeed somewhat startle Caesar. "But—well!" he said, after a moment's pause. "Pier wends to Rome also as a pilgrim, like yourself!—As such, the lieutenant of the father of Christendom can, without offence to any man or state, bid him welcome."

A slender but graceful knight, armed in complete steel, excepting that he wore no helmet, and his long fair hair was parted over a countenance full of mildness and melancholy, now rode towards the speakers. A single man-at-arms, with a blue banner, strewed with the well known golden balls of the Medici, followed him. By a coincidence not very desirable, Machiavelli at the same moment joined the duke, so that the expelled prince and the ambassador of the republic met face to face. There was a moment's pause.

"Ser Niccolò, of the Machiavelli?" said Pier, in a mild tone. "A learned and valiant gentleman, whom indeed we are very glad to see."

"I am the ambassador of the Florentine republic, signor," replied Machiavelli, somewhat sternly. "But I am indeed very glad also to meet your lordship here."

"Ha, ha, Messer Niccolò, how like your citizens my late visit to the Valdarno!" said Vitellozzo, smiling ferociously at the recollections which arose in his mind.

"So well that they intend to return it anon, my lord," replied the envoy.

"I trow that all the plagues of Egypt could not have done better among the lands of those bloody murderers!" continued the gigantic chieftain, flushing darkly.

"Nay, nay, you take too many for one!—Your brother's manes must long since have been appeased!" said Caesar, purposely reviving the recollection.

"There are some, Lord Caesar, who value a brother's blood as merchants do their wares!" returned Vitellozzo fiercely. "But mine I have written on every rood of Florentine earth, and hope to do it yet more plainly in Florence herself!"

"Tush, tush, Vitello, —you mistake," interposed Pier earnestly, to his impolitic ally.

"I shall not fail to write to my lords to tell them so," replied Ser Niccolò.

"And add—" continued the chieftain in a raised voice and trembling with rage, when again Pier interrupted him.

"Nay, but rather, my good Niccolò," he said, "ride on with me, and I will speak to thee of matters conducive to the ending of this dire brawl!"

"My lord, as we see, you have your pills gilded," replied the ambassador, with a scornful glance at the banner; "but yet, I do assure you, the Florentine republic will not swallow them again."

"Sirs, sirs," said Beinbo, who had at length joined in the group, "when are we to reach Rome, if we stand here chatting until the sun goes down? —'Tis my advice that we all proceed instantly, and leave future matters to futurity."

Perceiving that no good was likely to ensue from any further discussion, all parties tacitly assented to this arrangement; and Caesar, as if to

give the friends an opportunity of conversing freely, said that he would be their herald into Rome; and bending courteously to the group, he motioned to Machiavelli, returned with him to his own troops, and gave the order to advance. Some short time elapsed ere Vitellozzo's party followed the example.

"And dost thou think that I will ever willingly endure the arrogant equality of yonder Gog and Magog in one?—that bull in armour?" said Cæsar, observing the gloom which lingered on Machiavelli's brow. "And for the Medici!—dost thou deem that I have forgotten the day when I journeyed to Florence to beg the life of a servant of mine, who had slain a Florentine citizen in some brawl, of this very Pier? My father was then but a simple cardinal, looking for the tiara in the dust—and Pier was in the puff of his fortune! By the mass, Niccolò, I waited a whole day in his ante-chamber among his lacqueys, and at sunset he sent me word he was busy, and could not see me! Busy! at a feast! Whereat, being stung, I left the poor wretch to his mercy, and he had him broken on the wheel; my most faithful servant—broken on the wheel!"

Ser Niccolò looked somewhat comforted at this vivid recollection of an insult, which he knew the proud never forgive.

The distant city gradually became more visible, with its innumerable spires and pinnacles rising in the brilliant air: and the desert aspect of the country was relieved by numerous groups of pilgrims. The majority of the devotees were indeed arrived, especially those who came from remote districts of Europe, but many groups of knights with their vassals, and the farmers and serfs of the campagna, poured forth. Sometimes, too, an abbot with all his monastery, or an abbess with her gentle recluses, ambled over the plain on their sleek mules, attended by armed retainers, and frequently bearing some precious reliques under sumptuous canopies. Some were travelling as if to a carousal, others to a funeral; some armed, some almost naked, beggars, princes, priests, nobles, vassals, soldiers, trooped on for once in peace and mutual forbearance. Devotion took many curious forms; but in particular a group of Spanish pilgrims went past, with the cockle-shells of St. James of Compostella in their broad hats, bare to the waist, their backs completely raw and streaming with blood from the severe flagellation they inflicted on themselves with leather whips, singing loud Hosannas as they went.

But Rome was before the gaze of Cæsar and his companion—only the narrow Tiber seemed to flow between—for a mist of glory shed over it by the setting sun confused the perception of distance.

"Rome, Rome, my Niccolò!" exclaimed Cæsar, with an enthusiasm to which he seldom gave way. "There she stands, the dethroned empress of the world, who will place her diadem on the brow of the peerless knight that shall win it back from the caitiff hands which have torn it from her temples! By the mass! yon circling walls with their towers seem to me to float in the air like one vast crown of beaten gold!"

"Is not yonder the tomb of Nero?" said Ser Niccolò, with extreme coldness, pointing to a remote and solitary ruin.

"Ay, and a fortress of the Frangipani!" said Cæsar, calming down. "Mark you not their banner with the broken loaf? But what is all that stirring on the bridge?"

"I see what appears to me like a great procession, and a mob," replied Ser Niccolò, straining his sight. "But here come wayfarers, who I doubt not bring us the news."

Two personages mounted on mules, one of whom wore the mitre and robes of a bishop, followed at a distance by some knights whose rich armour continually flashed like cloth of diamonds in the sun, were seen approaching.

“By my faith, it is my friend the Bishop of Modena, Datary, and king of financiers,” said Cæsar, eagerly. “And with him comes the pompous fool, Master John of Strasburgh, his holiness’s master of the ceremonies, who, if the gates of heaven were open to all mankind but for half an hour, would wait till it came to the turn of the deans before he offered to enter.”

The personages whose characters were thus described were now so near that their material presentments might also be scrutinized. The Datary was a man about sixty, with a little, lean and shrivelled form, and a face which was generally cast down as if in humility, but when lifted, so closely resembled that of a red fox, in the sharp cunning features, in the peculiar glitter of the eye, that few beheld it without making the comparison. The other was a fat bulky man, whose large, dull, German visage was as it were oiled all over with self-complacency and stolidity, and contrasted curiously with the acute physiognomy of the Datary. This was that papal Polonius, John Burchard, whose diary remains to verify some of the most incredible passages of this true history.

“Burciardo! yonder is the duke,” exclaimed the Datary, switching his mule.

“It cannot be—without befitting attendance!” said the master of the ceremonies, “and in advance of his whole army.”

“Nay, but it is!—there is not another pair of eyes in all Italy which flash like those,” continued the Datary, pushing vigorously on.

“It does not become your reverend lordship to trot,” returned Burchard.

“It becomes every man—prudent man at least—to show his zeal on this happy occasion,” said the bishop, continuing at a pace which soon brought him to the spot where the duke and the Florentine had paused. Great ceremonies of welcome ensued, and the Datary informed Cæsar that his holiness had ordered his entry should be greeted with every mark of respect, and that a procession awaited him at the Ponte Molle.

“His holiness has also decreed your grace a gold and silver illumination, and a triumphal pomp, which, inasmuch as sufficient time has not been allowed for preparation, we pray your grace to excuse,” said the Dean of Strasburgh with becoming pomposity. “Meanwhile I am to conduct the most serene personage to the Colonna palace, which his holiness has been pleased to confer upon him, not only as a present lodging, but as a lodging present, and where he is to reside henceforth.”

“The Colonna palace! is there then no room for a simple soldier in the Vatican?” said Cæsar, with a dark frown.

“The royal lady, your august spouse, inhabits the Colonna palace, and there only can your grace’s retinue be suitably lodged,” replied Burchard, timidly shrinking from the ominous scowl. “The sacred palace is filled with illustrious pilgrims, and the magnificent lady, Donna Lucrezia, is expected to arrive there to-morrow.”

“Donna Lucrezia! lodged in the Vatican?” exclaimed Cæsar. “Surely so great a scandal—why ‘tis as if we heard—tell me, Burciardo, hast thou in all thy experience, in all thy researches in the chronicles of the papacy, heard of women openly lodged in the palace of St. Peter?”

"Heard we never of Pope Joan?" whispered Ser Niccoldò; but Burchard merely looked foolish and frightened, and made no reply.

"But since the holy father cannot err, we are bound to obey his will, without inquiring into it," said the duke with ironical bitterness. "Hasten, honest John, and tell the gapers I am coming. And thou, Don Miguel," he added, as the obsequious master of the ceremonies retired, "go and tell the Orsino and his companions to come up and share my honours as brethren should—and fail not to enlarge upon this novelty of lodging a lady in the house of a priest. And so his holiness will have the Tiber between himself and his loving son?" he continued, to the Datary, as his ready captain started off.

"Yea, and your grace cannot cross it without permission asked," returned the Datary, with a short, dry, malicious laugh. "Old Piccolomini, to whom the council gave the government of the city when the Orsini flew to arms, on learning Signor Paolo's mishap,—the Cardinal of Sienna, I ought to say!—has appointed a new captain to Santangelo."

"Wherefore then did his holiness make me constable for life?" said Caesar, clenching his teeth.

"You had need to visit us, my lord, at this time," continued the Datary. "There are men about his holiness bent on making mischief between ye, and who throw a cross light on all you do!—Why, when the Orsino disappeared, it was as much as these who were faithful to you could do to hinder him from putting himself at the head of his guards to march and punish the banditti, leaving Rome to be seized by the barons. 'Tis strange how strongly he is set on this match now that the negotiation with Ferrara has failed."

"My sister is a widow now—full twelve months! his holiness hath his reasons!" returned Caesar. "But I will find a way with all these evil counsellors! Have ye yet heard in Rome of the merry trick I played Signor Don Remiro in Ronciglione?"

The Datary bent the full keenness of his foxy eyes on Caesar, with a smile that seemed to anticipate something particularly facetious, and replied in the negative. But when the duke related the tragedy, with a gaiety which was really fiendish, the financier's visage whitened, as if he himself were about to receive a doom of similar horror.

"You do not laugh, monsignor, and yet what is more diverting than to see a rogue caught in his own snares?" said Caesar, sharply turning to the pallid minister.

"I conceive so, my lord,—yes, it is very diverting, but I know not what his holiness will think—sawn in twain!" stammered the Datary.

"A double politician easily makes two," said the duke, laughing scornfully. "But I will produce evidence of his guilt to satisfy a consistory of unbelieving Jews! But how say you—the Orsini drew their knives?"

"All Rome was in a roar; the Colonnas themselves ventured to appear; the Cenci, the Conti, the Salviati barricadoed their streets; we were all out of our senses with alarm saving his holiness, who, when the pilgrims flocked down to the Vatican in commotion, spoke to them from the balcony, and convinced them that it was not one of their number who had been captured."

"Why, the old ruins must be nigh peopled again with this foreign multitude!" said Caesar, observing with surprise the immense masses which covered the way from the river to the city walls.

"But, alas! they are uncommonly greedy, and yield little of what might

be expected in return for the prodigal beneficence of the holy father!" said the rapacious financier sadly.

"Ye should have made your indulgences dearer then, and harder to win—why take ye not the lesson from women?" returned Cæsar. The Datary had by this time recovered from his panic, and began laughing, apparently at some sprightly recollection.

"Your grace will be surprised to see the cardinal of Lisbon, without attendance, and almost in rags, that was once the most magnificent of the sacred college?" he said, still laughing. "You shall hear how it chanced. Being as he imagined at death's door, and thinking to cheat the church of her inheritance of his wealth, he made it all away in gifts to his relations and servants before he drew the breath. But Heaven, to punish him for his designed fraud, answered their hypocritical prayers, and he recovered; but not one of these ungrateful wretches would bestow on him even an alms from his own riches, and now he is a beggar, and a living warning to all who think to cheat the sacred treasury!"

It was a gorgeous spectacle which now saluted the gaze of the returning general of the church. The river was crowded with gilded galleys, whose richly carved prows, variegated standards, and pictured keels were magnificently relieved by the burnished gold of the waves. The bridge was spanned by a triumphal arch, in which the ingenious artist, while preserving the proportions of architecture, had managed to twist laurels, and spears, and trumpets into a resemblance of its richest ornaments; on the bridge were assembled the principal persons deputed to receive the duke—cardinals, in their scarlet robes and purple mantles, on mules; the barons of Rome, principally of inferior grade, glittering in armour and in jewelled mantles of flaunting colours; prelates in sacerdotal pomp; numerous domestics, pages, and footmen or staffieri in the most gorgeous liveries, and surrounded by the steel-clad ranks of the pope's Spanish guard.

Beyond the bridge the whole valley between the Marian and Pincian hills, up which the road to Rome proceeds, was thronged with a splendid and ever-varying multitude. Nobles, surrounded each by his mass of armed retainers; ambassadors from foreign courts displaying the royal banner of their countries, each attended by his glittering herald and retinues, which vied with one another in prodigality of decoration, velveted, jewelled, embroidered, and plumed; the guilds of the city, each headed by its gonfalonier, with rich flags ornamented with some appropriate device; the prefect of Rome with a white flag, on which, in letters of gold surrounded by laurel, blazed the antique initials S. P. Q. R.; and mingling with all these gorgeous groups—flooding indeed the whole valley, crowning the pine-clad mounts which formed it, massed upon the walls, and all the ascents of the seven hills, from whence even the most distant view could be obtained,—were grouped innumerable gazers—pilgrims from every land of the known world, in every garb, speaking as many tongues as at the confusion of Babel. The round battlements of St. Angelo topped the view, or rather the vast standard, wrought with golden keys of enormous size, which waved from a lofty tree on its summit. Trumpets and drums resounded in all directions, and over the whole animated and dazzlingly changeful spectacle shone the sky of a Roman twilight, like a dome of pallid gold.

The duke had scarcely time to take a cursory view of these preparations ere Paolo Orsino, with Sir Reginald and Don Migueloto, rode up to him.

"Vitellozzo prays your excuse, my lord," said the Orsino with obvious hesitation. "He dares not trust his barbarians to any guidance but his own."

"Alas, Paolo, he still mistrusts us!" replied Cæsar, mournfully. "Is there no way by which we can convince him of our sincerity? Go, dear Paolo, and say that we entreat him, then, to precede us into the city, and to take up his quarters round the Colonna palace, for we will have no guard but his valiant barbarians!"

"Is the Colonna palace, then, confiscated?" said the baron, rather aghast at this intimation of the total ruin, even of the nobles against whom his house had so long waged war.

"Ay, dost thou think, brother, that 'tis fit when the hornets are dispersed to leave the nest?" returned Cæsar. "Where, too, is the noble Hospitaller? He should share these vanities with us!"

"He has dropped far in the rear, to gloom at his leisure," said Paolo testily; and after a moment's thought he hastened back to the Vitelli.

"Noble English knight, may I crave you to warn our friends at the bridge of our approach?" said Cæsar, with such bland courtesy, that Sir Reginald could not refuse, and the knight, although indignant at the office of herald thus thrust upon him, bowed and dashed his war-horse forward to the bridge.

"Oh, my Niccolò, fear thou not but I will some day avenge thy lords on this insolent brood!" said Cæsar, with the rage hitherto suppressed flashing in his eyes.

"Will your grace have your tent pitched, and attire you in more state for this great occasion?" said Don Migueloto.

"I know not which of my garbs might be noted among all this crimson and gold!" said the duke. "Herein, to be observed, a man must be simple! I will wear the plainest robe I have—the black velvet—the velvet I wore at Gandia's funeral!—a fraternal sadness which will give the lie to many a gossip; and let my gentlemen be all in their doleful blacks too!"

A tent was hastily pitched at some remove from the road, along which the legions of Vitellozzo now heavily moved. Whether the chieftain, notwithstanding those suspicions of the Borgia which never left him, found that he could not with any grace refuse his request, or that the making it lulled his fears, he complied; and heading his cuirassiers with a broad axe in his hand, the edge of which he turned over his mighty shoulder from those he approached, he passed over Ponte Molle but a few minutes before Cæsar followed.

In his lugubrious dress of black velvet, ornamented only by a chain of massive gold beads, and a medal in his hat, the duke's appearance was certainly more remarked than the gayest which he could have assumed. A general shout, followed by a protracted buzz of curiosity, once more shook the shores of the Tiber, which had so often echoed to the welcome of conquerors. Pier de Medici had accompanied Vitellozzo into the city, with his visor closed, and near the duke rode only the Orsino and Machiavelli. Don Migueloto had been despatched with some secret commission to the array in the rear.

Observing the duke's approach, the master of the ceremonies, who was watching with intense anxiety for the precise instant, made a bow to the personages whose immediate office it was to receive him. Three cardinals instantly set their mules in motion. The first was an ancient

man, whose serene and pious visage, worn by time and maceration, presented an engaging and dignified portrait of devotion; the two others were young men, both handsome and of noble persons, one of them remarkable for his stately and princely gravity, and his fellow for a dashing vivacity rather befitting the cavalier than the priest. The former was the Cardinal of Medici, afterwards Leo X. The latter, the Cardinal Adrian of Corneto, famous for his share in a subsequent tragical adventure. The eldest cardinal was afterwards that Pius III. whose short reign left only regrets behind.

The shout again arose—and again sunk into silence—when the cardinal and the duke met, and the venerable prelate delivered the benediction of the church, and afterwards a Latin harangue in commendation of his exploits. The Borgia listened with bare head, and bending in deep humility over his steed, whose snorts frequently disturbed the harangue, and at which the master of the ceremonies glanced with restrained indignation. Once or twice the Cardinal of Medici involuntarily smiled, perhaps at the monkish Latin of his superior, perhaps at the grotesque faces and sly buffooneries of the young Corneto during the speeches of welcome and modest acceptance. And before it was concluded,—despite all the warning waftures of the Dean of Strasburgh's wand of office,—an old nobleman on foot, and surrounded by a number of cavaliers, a cardinal, another prelate, and about a score of footmen in the white and red flames of the Orsini livery, approached. The last words of the greeting were interrupted by the embraces of Paolo Orsino and his family, of whom the ancient nobleman was his father, the Duke of Gravina.

Some idea of the power of this great house may be formed from the fact, that among the Orsini who pressed to receive the heir of their chieftain were no less than seven barons, a cardinal, an archbishop, and nearly a score of inferior captains, who each, however, possessed some castle or place of strength near Rome. In spite of all efforts to the contrary, tears rushed down the furrowed cheeks of Gravina, when he clasped his son to his breast, and sobs heaved his stont old heart. Cæsar himself seemed moved, for he turned aside as if to conceal his feelings; but those to whom he turned thought that his lips writhed rather with derision than tenderness.

The Orsini were relieved from an observation, which after the first burst of joy became oppressive, by the cares of Burchard, who now requested the ambassadors to advance and pay their compliments. Instantly the whole diplomatic corps was in motion, struggling and hurrying to gain the precedence, which the dean vainly attempted to obviate by yelling to each his proper station in the advance. The English ambassador, a grave and majestic noble, distinguished by the pointed beard then coming into fashion in the west, with his retinue of young cavaliers, pushed so vigorously forward that he arrived as soon as the emperor's envoy, who had yet, by prescription, precedence of all, and was, moreover, favoured in locality by master John of Strasburgh.

Great confusion followed this untoward event, the rest of the ambassadors arriving to greet the duke in such disorder and eagerness that he laughed and exclaimed—“What, messires, ye will knock off each other's spurs at this rate!”

“None shall but touch mine till he hath first knocked my head off, signor!” exclaimed the Spanish ambassador, furiously.

"The Spaniards are not wont to boast, my lord knows!" said the French ambassador—a splendid cavalier, who sat his steed with knightly grace, and eyed the stiff Spaniard with evident disdain.

"Ah, noble d'Aubigny!" said Cæsar, eagerly stretching his hand to the envoy of the formidable power he had offended. "Never did I rejoice more to behold thy victorious crest, for I see thou art at our peaceful triumph in complete panoply."

"Which I may not change till I have fulfilled my king's behests from Milan," replied the French warrior, haughtily, and Cæsar turned from him to caress the Spaniard.

While the ambassadors were offering their congratulations, Paolo was searching among the crowds for his deliverers, that he might present them to his sire. But Sir Reginald, offended at the use to which Cæsar had put him, had hastened over the bridge, and the Hospitaller had not appeared for some time. Burciardo allowed as long as possible for the compliments, but he now pushed into the throng to inform the duke that the most serene and royal princess his wife had been for a long period awaiting his presence on the other side of the bridge.

Cæsar slightly started, and waving his hand with smiling courtesy to the ambassadors, set his horse in motion. The master of the ceremonies earnestly entreated them not to stir, but disregarding his entreaties all pushed fiercely on, and he was swept along in the height of his expostulations. As Cæsar crossed the bridge his person became distinctly visible to the immense groups which filled the valley to Rome, and the sinister gloom of his habiliments uniting with the tremendous reports of his character, produced a great effect. Some faint attempts at a shout were audible, which died away in indistinct and awe-struck mutters,—were again renewed, and then passed into utter silence.

The silence of a great multitude is fearful, and Cæsar glanced with his brilliant eyes over the masses with some alarm. Luckily some partisans of the exiled Colonna, screened by distance, ventured to raise their war-cry, and instantly arose a stormy "Viva Borgia!"—"Orso, Orso!"—which effectually broke the silence.

The bride of Cæsar appeared a little way beyond the bridge, mounted on a palfrey covered with white velvet, led by grooms in cloth of gold, under a canopy of crimson velvet sown with the lilies of France, and surmounted by a royal crown, borne by four knights in silver armour. She was a very young and lively-looking French girl, with an air of coquetry and vivacity which disappeared instantly, as well as the colour from her cheek, as her terrible lord appeared. A bevy of beautiful ladies, her attendants, and the proud consorts of the barons of Rome, formed a superb cavalcade around her.

"See you, neighbour, how he kisses her hand, while his eyes are all the while among the damsels about her?" said a knight in the crowd to a little deformed dwarf, who with a smile of malignant mirth stood scratching a disproportioned head beside him.

"And why not, neighbour? They are older acquaintances of his than the north girl," replied the dwarf. "Know you not that to avoid scandal Cæsar has appointed his seraglio to wait on his wife?"

At this moment a considerable confusion and uproar in the crowd forming the procession attracted the attention of all. In truth the ambassadors, after struggling and jostling one another over the bridge, had come to direct contest at its exit, each obstinately refusing to yield to

the other. The imperial ambassador's precedence alone was not disputed, but the ambassadors of France, Spain, England, Naples, and Navarre, fiercely contended for the lead. In vain did Burchard quote innumerable authorities assigning them each their place in the apostolic processions; —his voice, though loud and shrill, was lost in the uproar. Swords were drawn, and the French and English ambassadors were at sharp and angry parley.

“The most Christian king is the eldest son of the church!” yelled the master of the ceremonies; “and as such——”

“We are ambassadors from the Lord Cæsar’s royal father-in-law, and as such——,” remonstrated the Navarrese.

“The crown of England shall yield to none but that of the empire!” shouted the English ambassador.

“The most Catholic kings, my sovereigns!”—began the Spanish envoy, stroking his long beard rapidly.

“We are the first, as the representatives of the church’s faithful vassal, king Don Federigo of Naples!” shouted the Neapolitans.

The multitudes of the different nations scattered among the crowds caught intelligence of what was going on, and their tumultuous cries and gestures seemed to announce some terrible outbreak.

Cæsar took the opportunity to commence his policy of conciliation to the French.

“Marshal d’Aubigny,” he said, in the first pause of the uproar. “I will ride between you and the ambassador of the emperor. I may surely this day choose my company! Navarre cannot be denied his place by his sovereign’s daughter!”

“Now by the thistle of my own Scotland, I will not yield to all England and Italy to boot!” said the ambassador, who was a valorous soldier of fortune, by birth a Scot, and allied to the royal family of Scotland, as he dashed forward to the place assigned him.

“St. George and England to the rescue!” shouted a young knight, urging his steed with headlong violence through the crowd, drawing his sword, and bending low to the ambassador.

“Sir Reginald Le Beaufort!” exclaimed the ambassador. “Good knight and loyal!—nay, the odds are too much against us; but, Master Dean, take notice that I withdraw myself from the procession, because I am not allowed my proper place in it.”

“Your proper place, magnificent signor,” began the worthy dean.

“God’s life! is it at the tail of the men who cannot face us in the field?” returned the foaming English earl. “Here is my gauntlet against the best of you that denies the right of the crown of England to march before all but the Imperial.”

“My lord, as far back as any record extends, the kings of France”—ejaculated the master of the ceremonies.

“French knights! which of you will break a lance with me on this quarrel!” shouted Sir Reginald.

Many a hand was instantly on the lance, many a steed received a sudden spur; but the aged cardinal of Sienna urged his mule between the enraged challenger and his antagonists.

“Know ye not, bold man!” he exclaimed, “that in this holy season of Christian love and fellowship of all men in Christ, decree of excommunication—excommunication which is damnation!—is denounced against all who shall draw brand or dagger, or wield lance in any manner of hostility?”

There was immediately a pause of submission, reluctant indeed, but still of submission. Lances sunk, steeds were checked, and during the pause Burciardo restored his glove to the English ambassador, who received it with a mixture of rage and submission.

Somewhat cooling his ire, the ambassador turned to invite his valiant young countryman to accompany him home to his palace, when Paolo Orsino, who had heard the voice at a distance, arrived with all his potent kinsmen around him. He pressed Sir Reginald so vehemently to become his guest, moreover declaring that he had found the canon, and had despatched him to obtain the Hospitaller's company too, that Le Beaufort declined the ambassador's proffer, and accepted that of his friend.

The procession was now moving on, and although the hues of twilight began to fall purple on the groups, the splendour of the effect, as it went, could scarcely be surpassed. Helmets and mitres flashed, plumes soared, banners streamed, lances sparkled—a rainbow effulgence of colour glowed along the rich groups in their liveries and pompous ceremonial garbs. All the discordant peals of military music, softened amid the general tramp and murmur, harmonized with one gorgeous triumphal melody. A poet might have imagined he was gazing on an antique Roman spectacle, when conquerors returned with the spoils of nations! The splendour of the show produced its usual effect on that vast mob, despite the secret aversion and horror entertained by so many against its hero; and as the procession reached the Porta del Popolo, the shouts of welcome and gratulation shook the seven hills of the eternal city, as they had shaken them to greet the return of a Pompey or the departure of a Brutus!

The moment the procession reached the walls, the bells of the innumerable churches of Rome burst into a simultaneous peal, and kept up their stirring melody during its whole progress through the city, till the air itself seemed maddening with clamour. At the same time, immense bonfires were kindled on the seven hills, and vast pyramids of flame ascended above the cypresses, and palaces, and ruins which thickly strewed them. The twilight reddening with the reflection of the fires, gave a new and singularly beautiful hue to the colours of the procession, as it passed up the Corso, the palaces on each side of which were hung with costly pictures, and tapestry, banners, and triumphal arches, inscribed with glorifying inscriptions and verses.

Turning from the Corso to go to Sant'Angelo, the procession passed towards the Piazza Navona. In this district lay the chief strength of the Orsini—the great square being environed with the palaces of the chief barons of the name, and streets inhabited only by their clansmen or clients, as the Roman nobles were still pleased to style their dependents. Here were their fortress of Monte Giordano, and the palace of the Massimi, their devoted kinsmen and allies, the colony extending its ramifications over a great space to the bend of the river, opposite the Isle of the Tiber, where arose, on the ruins of the theatre of Marcellus, their strong fortress, which they specifically denominated Palazzo Orsini. Entering this camp, as it might be called, of his enemies, the narrow gloomy streets of which were all hung with chains, levelled cannon appearing at every opening into the square,—Cæsar looked round for the Orsini.

“I will not enter without my hosts!” he said, with a caressing smile, and harking his horse till it was abreast with Paolo's, he added, “We will on together like brothers—for, indeed, henceforth we are to be but equals in Rome!”

Probably the Orsino divined the duke's suspicions, for there was something disdainful in the silent bend with which he received this honour. The procession moved on.

They entered the great square. All looked dark, silent, and melancholy. Suddenly, a blast of trumpets was heard, and as if by magic an immense bonfire blazed up in the centre of the square, to the height of the surrounding houses; garlands of flaming pith appeared at every window; and starting from the pavements on which they were couched, as from the earth, gleamed an armed multitude, all in the Orsini livery! Cæsar gave an involuntary jerk in his saddle, put his hand on his dagger, and seized Paolo's hand—who returned his grasp with a friendly pressure, and another smile of doubtful meaning. But the duke perceived instantly that no treachery was meant, and he himself joined in the uproarious shouts which now resounded from every street and alley, and palace around, of Orso!—Borgia! Borgia!—Borgia! Orso!

With this shout mingled the roar of forty bullocks which stood chained to stakes around the bonfire, the glare of which and the uproar affrighted the poor animals. But the roar soon ceased;—butchers placed near the oxen despatched them with their axes preparatory to roasting them at the bonfire. At the same moment the two fountains at the extremities of the piazza began to pour, each from its three dolphins' heads, wines of six different colours. Amidst the rush of the populace to share this refreshment—the groans of the dying beasts—the shouts of the mob—the procession crossed the square, their horses snorting and prancing at the blaze, and slipping as they curvetted in the newly-shed blood.

Notwithstanding these honours, it is probable that Cæsar was not grieved when he had fairly passed through the Orsini quarter, and approached the bridge of Santangelo. Nevertheless it was observed that he turned pale as the river came in sight, and there was something demoniac and wild in his gaze. Some who were looking at him earnestly imagined that it was the recollection of a black deed which writhed within him; for there—right in front—arose that vast and gloomy pile—the fortress-tomb of the once master of the world,—which had received his brother's disfigured corpse when rescued from the ooze of the Tiber. Others more charitable ascribed his emotion to the contrast thus forced upon him of his own glories with that brother's dismal tragedy! But his paleness might merely have been the chilling hues of the moon, which had now risen broad and full in the darkening twilight, and shone over the terraces of the Vatican and the spires of St. Peter—for as yet Michael Angelo had not hung the Pantheon in the air.

All conjectures on this subject were speedily swallowed in others more cogent. The legions of Vitellozzo appeared drawn up, as if in order of battle, in the centre of the square before the bridge, which they ought already to have crossed. Marvelling at a delay which was likely to increase the confusion of the armed masses, the duke's alarms again returned—and there was a fierceness in his eyes when he inquired the matter, which affrighted the soldier to whom he spoke so much that he could not reply. But Vitellozzo almost instantly appeared, and with a countenance by no means so full of regret as his words, informed Cæsar that his Germans refused to lower their standard in homage to that of the church on Santangelo, because the Swiss and Gascouns who garrisoned it had set up their own flags on the ramparts below, and it might be construed into a mark of homage to those mercenaries, which their German competitors

would not endure. On the other hand the Gascons threatened to discharge their artillery if the Germans passed without the required obeisance; and in this dilemma the captain of Santangelo and himself had agreed to await his grace's commands.

There was a smile of dull malice and hatred on Vitellozzo's face, as if he had reduced the general of the church to a dilemma, which did not escape Cæsar's penetration. And a dilemma it was! It seemed that he must either suffer an insult to be offered to the sovereignty of the church in her metropolis, before the gaze of Christendom, or exhibit his own weakness in a vain attempt to compel a submission which the proud mercenaries were not likely to yield.

A moment's musing showed Cæsar both these horns of the alternative,—another suggested to him not only an escape, but advantages to be reaped from it.

“Let the captain of Santangelo attend me—methinks I am still the constable! Where is Don Migueloto?” and he glanced round. The Catalan was at hand, following at the head of Cæsar's antique guard. He beckoned to him—the watchful myrmidon was by his side in an instant.

The captain of Santangelo at the same time approached, bearing with him a ring or rather hoop of massive keys, which he probably intended to present, by way of compliment, to the constable.

“What!—or are we mistaken?” said the duke, colouring darkly, as a massive Swiss approached with a spear of the usual vast length of the infantry of that country, then the most famous in Europe. “Pflinger!—whom we forbade ever to appear again in the Roman jurisdiction!—Homicide! what dost thou here?” And suddenly stooping to the astonished Swiss, he snatched the keys, and handed them over his shoulder to Migueloto. “Go with your men,” he continued to the Catalan. “Tell the Swiss and Gascons to meet me instantly on the other side of the bridge, with their standards, to be my escort to the Vatican!—Till then, Germans, let none pass!—If afterwards they assail you, help yourselves as ye well know in time of need!—And thou Migueloto, art from this instant my captain of Santangelo.”

The fierce flash of Cæsar's eye fell upon the discomfited visage of Vitellozzo, and so rueful was its expression, that he laughed aloud, and the whole mass of the spectators laughed in uproarious concert. Ser Niccolò's worn features gleamed with a satirical and yet melancholy smile.

Vitelli stood for a moment irresolute: he glanced at the Orsini, but they, too, were laughing; he glanced at his mercenaries—they sat wearily on their exhausted steeds—and he laughed also! But the sound of his cacchination suddenly stilled that of the assembly. Something he probably meant to say—perhaps something to do—which would have compromised the newly-restored peace—when suddenly all attention was caught and absorbed in a report which sounded like the explosion of a volcano, and the whole summit of the fortress-sepulchre appeared as if disgorging a sea of flames, which flowed over the battlements in streams of crimson fire!

CHAPTER XV.

“ Her face was to mine eye beyond all wonder;
 The rest (bark in thine ears) as black as incest.”
Pericles, Prince of Tyre.

That the Swiss and Gascons, in their rage at the orders which Migueloto had probably by this time carried them, had blown up the fortress, was the thought which struck every heart like the blow of a hammer! The Germans shouted and brought their lances with a loud clash to the rests. But alarm in an instant became wonder, when the lava overflow seemed suddenly to curl up its torrents, and rush upwards even to the sky, forming a pyramid of fire, the base of which was as broad as the immense tower from which it rose. The pyramid itself appeared then to rise in the air, until by some wondrous, and as it seemed to the multitude, magic device, its base rounded, hollowed, and became like a crown of laurels of the purest flame! Beneath the extraordinary effulgence of this illumination, the river, the fortress, the immense multitude of gazing faces, the towers of the Vatican, the bridge, the galleys,—all became of red hot hues. But the wonders in store even exceeded these. A black cloud suddenly rushed over the battlements, and sounds as if of a wild tempest were heard, with gleams of lightning darting jaggedly around. The cloud gradually grew thinner and brighter in the middle, until, as if through a veil of crape, the figure of a woman appeared, of great beauty, to judge from the perfect symmetry of the outlines, for the face was averted. Her long black hair flowed wildly on the wind from beneath a crown of polished silver; she wore a black robe, girded at the waist with a silver serpent, and seemed engaged in some mysterious ceremony, waring over her head a branch of an apple tree of gold, with golden fruit.

“ In our Lady’s name, what may all this be?” exclaimed Vitellozzo, crossing himself many times, and speaking to the dispossessed Swiss.

“ Surely ‘tis the work of the sorceress of Santangelo!” replied the aghast castellan.

“ Sorceress! what sorceress, idiot?” exclaimed Cæsar, fiercely.

“ The nun who is imprisoned there—who was stolen from our lady’s house on Mount Aventine by the pagan sultan, signor!” replied the Swiss, confusedly. “ His holiness commanded me not to meddle with her, or by the Holy Cross!—”

“ A crown!—and of laurels!—it is Fiamma!” interrupted Cæsar, as if he heard not what was said in his absorption. The populace, perceiving the drift of the flaming allegory, applauded it with a terrific shout, and fired with the gorgeous vision which filled his imagination, Cæsar bent to the people with the majesty of an emperor receiving his crown. But at the same instant his flushed countenance grew white, his teeth became clenched, his eyes stared wildly and fixedly forward, and his locks were drenched in the dark sweat which streamed down his face.

Luckily, at this instant, the great gate of Santangelo opened, and Migueloto rode out with the Swiss and Gascons following him in sullen silence. The approach of danger seemed to restore the balance to Cæsar’s powerful mind. He beckoned to the Swiss captain whom he had just dispossessed of his castellainship, and observed with a tart smile, “ It

might be, captain, that you were right—some ill might befall if this mass of cavalry crossed the bridge. Therefore keep it until you have further orders from the most reverend Cardinal of Sienna, your general! You know the Swiss slight cavalry charges, as rocks those of the sea! You will take our royal duchess no farther, with the end that all Christendom should know that we, at least, introduce no women into the Apostol palace."

The Swiss stared in a disconcerted manner at the duke, and strode hastily over the bridge to his soldiers, who halted at his command, but the Gascons rushed forward to greet Caesar with loud shouts of joy at welcome. The duke meanwhile glanced round, not expecting that the princess was advanced so far, but her zealous attendants had halted her only a few paces in the rear. The young duchess started the instant her lord's eye fell upon her, and for the first time that day she exercised her will unprompted, and turned her palfrey's head. But the staffers in green and crimson who held the bridle checked any further movement, none being able to believe that the princess could in reality mean to do anything unscripted in the day's programme.

"Ha! my gallant riders of Perigord at least have not forgotten me said Caesar, mingling among the Gascons, and addressing many of them by nicknames and rude patronymics which it was marvellous how I remembered, since the owners themselves might have been excused if they had forgotten them.

Thus dexterously had Caesar apparently thrown his enemies into confusion, the Swiss indeed not advancing, but seeming to await some hostile movement from the Germans. But Paolo Orsino had hastened back to Vitellozzo, and by his arguments prevailed upon him not to throw the city in the direful commotion which an assault would occasion, and the issue of which would be very doubtful, as the pontiff and the pilgrim would certainly construe the attack into one on themselves. Vitellozzo sullenly consented to remain where he was until Paolo's return, bitter at his subjoining, if he had the good fortune ever to do so. The Orsino then hastened to the Swiss captain, and prevailed upon him also to promise that he would take no steps until he received further commands, provided the Germans did not attempt to cross the river.

"What ails them now, thou merry bitterness, thou olives and wine said the Knight of St. John, who had formerly spoken to the deform tailor, and who was again driven by the pressure to the little man's side.

"How many eyes hast thou not to see by his glad countenance that is bidding his wife 'God be with her' till he sees her again?" return Paschino. "He will say that to her the day before doomsday some day or old mother Hecate's drugs will lose their virtue."

"But wherefore doth she not accompany him to the Vatican?" return the knight.

"Know you not that the entrance thereof is strictly forbidden to women—to believe the old songs which they call canons and bulls?" said the tailor.

"Have I not told thee what I have heard—that Donna Lucrezia is to lodge in the palace—doubtless with a female court?" said the knight sharply.

"Ergo te semper cupiet, Lucretia, Sextus!"

returned the dwarf, rubbing his hands and chuckling as if this black lie contained only a witty allusion.

"Paschino! hast thou not told me that certain monks saved thee, being a foundling left on a dunghill before their monastery—taught thee all thy scraps of learning—and dost thou laugh to utter such horrors against the supreme pastor of the church?" said the Hospitaller, with warmth.

"Truly, signor sparkle-beard! I was found by a friar even as you say," returned the droll. "But who knows who put me on the dunghill? Yet for certain I owe the monks my life—such as it is—perchance for a better reason than picking me up, like a jewel, from the mud!—They who hide can find! But I might forgive them my existenee, inasmuch as the girls around their monastery (I mean the holy brothers on Mount Aventine) are notoriously as tempting and ready as ripe melons!—But why should I forgive them for making a tailor of me—a fellow to line brocades and clip sleeves of the villainous Venice fashion—out of pure envy, lest their gravest doctors should be silenced, confuted, and put to shame, by the learning which might have been added to my natural parts?"

"No wise man whets a knife for his own throat—thou art even too keen already!" returned the Hospitaller. "Moreover, thou knowest that merit was not made to be rewarded in this world."

"But the prospect is far—beyond the moon?" said the dwarf. "However, I will get me one of those glasses through which they say that the Spaniards have lately seen a new world!—In faith, they do well to lie due west, for there is abundance of room from the Pillars of Hercules to Asia!"

The pressure of the crowd buffeting to accompany the now advancing procession, against the stream which set in to escort the returning bride of Caesar, quickly separated the gossips. The Knight of St. John urging on his charger to regain the line of procession, with difficulty penetrated the masses of the populace crowding into the square of St. Peter, which was already thronged. Before him was the antique basilica of Constantine—that of Michael Angelo existed as yet only in his vast genius, like the statue in the marble.

The castle of Santangelo had elapsed into darkness, but in recompense the whole Vatican ascent was one blaze of light. The immense extent of the illuminations revealed that of the palace itself, which resembled rather an irregular city of palaces, of strange and varying architecture—pile after pile, pillars and towers, terraces, balconies, domes, bosomed amidst stately groves and gardens, all glittering with innumerable lamps, whose beams were softened into a silver haze by the white splendour of the moon. In a balcony over the portico of St. Peter, an assemblage of personages in habits whose gorgeousness the blaze of torches revealed, probably marked the spot from which the pontiff was pleased to witness his son's triumphant entry. But the radiance disappeared when the procession had fairly entered the square.

Anxious to witness the meeting of the sire and son, but keeping as much as possible in the rear of the gorgeous train of prelates and nobles, the Hospitaller regained the line of the procession, and was admitted as part of it. The whole pomp passed on in due marshalry to the Sala Regia, and entered it at the same time that from a magnificent staircase at the extremity the pontiff descended. The spectators might have thought that the procession to meet Cæsar must have exhausted the papal court: and yet large groups of gilded officials, and of pilgrims of illustrious rank, lay

and clerical, prelates from remote lands, princes, abbots, grand masters of the chief European orders of knighthood, monks, pages, guardsmen, continued to pour down the stairs in attendance on the pontiff.

The Hospitaller's anxiety to behold the pontiff was great, but he took care to remain so far amidst the throng, that his dark plume was the only piece of his habiliments visible. It needed not the gorgeous pontifical robes, stiff with gems, the blazing tiara, nor the golden keys in his hand, the glistening slippers wrought with the cross in rubies, the little canopy of cloth-of-gold borne over his head, to distinguish the person of Alexander the Sixth. He stood with the majesty of a Jupiter,—his great stature, his large and noble features, the despotism and irascibility of his regards not unsuited to the other characteristics of the son of Saturn. A nearer approach, it might be, dissipated something of this grandeur of person. The workings of age, the traces of furious passions, the lines wrought by care and sorrow, were visible in his countenance, and sometimes gave it, to the eye of the physiognomist, an expression of melancholy and devouring thought, approaching to anguish. Seventy years of ordinary existence leave iron prints; but when the turbulent career of Alexander is considered, his experience of almost all the varieties of fortune and conditions of life, of grief and joy, terror and triumph, struggle and victory, the adamantine quality of the soul appeared, which could support that weight of thought with so unbending a majesty.

The personages of Caesar's procession halted instantly on discovering that of the pontiff's, and filing open, the duke advanced up the passage thus made for him, taking Paolo Orsino familiarly by the arm, and leading him by his side. He looked very pale, but his eye glittered, and his manner was so hurriedly vivacious that it formed a great contrast to the austere and immovable majesty of the pontiff. The most skilful observer might have been foiled at the marvellous combination of expressions which Alexander's countenance exhibited. Sorrow and pride—suspicion and tenderness—the love of the father with the doubts and fears of the monarch receiving the homage of so formidable a subject—seemed to struggle for the mastery.

Three golden cushions pladed by Burciardo at prescribed intervals, the last at some distance from the stairs, marked the spots at which the duke was to pay his kneeling homage. He performed the ceremonial hastily, and when he reached the last cushion, the dean raised his wand, and in a loud voice commanded silence, for there was a great buzz and trampling in the saloon. A hundred ushers echoed the cry—and there was silence.

It was observed that Caesar, usually so glib of speech, slightly hesitated, for he was now expected to offer his thanks. But with his usual judgment, he spoke to the pontiff in Spanish, an idiom always pleasant to his ears, being that of his native land. "Behold me here, most blessed father!" he said, "to kiss with reverent tenderness your holy feet, and render due thanks for so many honours, for so many benefits conferred on me in this my long absence from your sight, although not from your heart, assuring your sanctity that not for these favours alone, but many others, I profess myself a singularly benefited son of our Holy Mother the church; proof of my everlasting gratitude for which I will give by pledging and holding my life in the service of the apostolic throne and of the sacred college—in which I glory to have been once counted a brother."

There was a moment's profound silence, and the pontiff, replied, not without some emotion in his tones, and in the same language. "Even

il now we have been well content with your actions, and now we re-
ve with satisfaction this attestation in words; which accepting as a
lge of your faith, and of a continual loyal service, we promise you
r to correspond to with greater honours, and rewards. The holy chair
ds not dominions and riches to exalt its majesty; but truly for princes
cknowledge its greatness, and to sustain it in the veneration of others,
ask none better than yourself, with the strength with which we shall
ust you, to the confusion of those, who show themselves the more
ntiful to us, in proportion to the obligations we heap upon them!"
he latter part of the speech touched many present, and it was with a
l glance at the Orsino that Cæsar advanced to kiss the cross on the
tiff's feet. The honour of saluting his cheek rarely granted to any but
reigns and the members of the sacred college, was also granted to the
e.

hen rising, Cæsar motioned to the Orsino to advance, and said, with
en glance at his sire, "None in this presence, holy father, need now
the sting of your reproach to the unfilial conduct of some! Signor
lo Orsino lighted on his mishap bringing to your throne the submis-
and devotion of its chief rebels!"

he young nobleman advanced, and knelt at Alexander's feet, who to
great scandal of the master of the ceremonies, instantly raised him,
kissed both his cheeks. "Welcome, thrice welcome out of the jaws
ie whale, beloved son!" he said, with a warmth which could scarcely
been feigned. "Know you not that we were about to draw the
rd of St. Peter, and come to the rescue ourself? It were not for the
time we have worn armour, God and our Lady wot well, and the
el Moors of Granada!"

he Orsino replied with the profound humility and gratitude due to so
ious a speech; and then intreating of his holiness permission to in-
uce one of his deliverers to his paternal notice, he beckoned to Sir
inald. The young knight was leaning in mute reverence on the cross
is sword; and although a summons to instant and deadly battle
ld scarcely have quickened his pulse, he responded to this signal with
we and perturbation which caused a general smile among the Italians.
We heard there was one of the brothers of the Holy Sepulchre in it
is is not he?" said the pontiff with great kindness. "Approach,
g man, and receive the blessing of heaven for a christian deed."
Most holy father! I am not worthy!" replied Sir Reginald, devoutly
ling.

Yea, and the worthier for thinking so—or but saying so is it with
too? Yet thy tongue rings with some of the honest discords of
nd sea!" said Alexander, smiling. "Master John, is he of thy blunt
en land?"

I know not whether of Saxony or of France, for methinks, holy
r, he is both fish and flesh," replied the master of the ceremonies.
More of a fish, please you, being an English islander," said Sir
inald, recovering his natural boldness.

Ha!—and is your king still wearing away with his consumption?"
the pontif, eagerly. "Hast thou any commission from him to this
ed festival? for indeed we fear those vast treasures he hath heaped
will hang like a leaden mountain on his ascending soul!"

The knight is from Ferrara, where he hath long tarried, holy father,"
Cæsar, with some emphasis.

"Ferrara!—How fares it with the good duke?" said the pontiff, with sudden haughtiness of manner. "Methinks—remembering that all his cities and lands have been assumed from the Holy See—he might have honoured us with a special embassy on this occasion!"

"Messer Pietro Bembo is at hand, and perchance is honoured with some such commission?" said Cæsar, suddenly turning, and indicating the canon, who stood, as he thought, secluded among the crowd.

"Most holy father!" said Bembo, somewhat flurriedly, "my master's duty to your paternity is so perfect that to protest it would, he thought, lay it open to suspicion, as for a merchant in diamonds to declare that there was no flaw in the one he offered, when no judicious eye imagined any!—and therefore I am only here on my devotion to the jubilee."

"Messer Bembo, you are a poet and an Italian—I am a simple man, and a native of Aragon," replied Alexander, sharply; for, in common with the other descendants of the warlike barbarians of the north, he entertained a profound contempt for the Italians.

"I also, holy father, am three parts Italian!" said the Duke of Romagna, with this dextrous move turning the general though silent resentment of the Italians at his father's contemptuous speech to his own favour.

The pontiff smiled. "Ay, nephew,—a Roman!" he said, but still with a tinge of contempt. "That was a fine name once, when the Colosseum stood whole—ere the Gothic fathers of Spain beheld it!—But we heard that the Lord of Città di Castello was with you: where is he now?"

"He came—with a thousand lanzknechts, to share your paternal absolution!" said Cæsar, emphatically; "who are also the cause why I have been compelled to send my own guard into Santangelo, and withdraw the Swiss and Gascons."

"Say you so?" exclaimed Alexander, with strong and evidently unpleasant surprise.

"The Germans are proud—Vitellozzo could not compel them to lower their standard before those of the Swiss, who threatened else to discharge their ordnance at us!" said the Orsino, very eagerly.

"What! do my Swiss, too, mutiny?—Where is Pflinger?" said Alexander, with a sudden darkening which betokened a storm.

"I have broken the slave!—he was one of the plunderers in the bandy-legged's army—of King Charles, I would say!" said the duke, hastily.

"Then, son, you know not that we have given him and his followers plenary remission of the same—is it not so, Gian-Battista?" said the pontiff, turning to the Datary.

"And moreover your holiness was pleased to remit to them the expenses of the bull," replied the minister, in a grave and disapproving tone.

"'Tis perchance, as well as it hath happed—Santangelo should be in sure hands at this season!" said the duke, with a significant glance. "And considering the strange words spoken by the Lord of Castello in the camp before Faenza, he is as well lodged on the farther side of the river."

"It was his passion, holy father, and a helmet-full of the thick wine of that country, which he had just drained, that spoke, not Vitellozzo!" said the Duke of Gravina, vehemently.

"The Lords Orsini are indeed good testimony, for they were all around him when he announced his hope to thrust your holiness from the chair of St. Peter!" said Cæsar, in a mild and interceding tone.

"Your holiness was once a soldier, and must needs remember how

the blood maddens in triumph!" said Paolo, with a mixture of humility and haughtiness.

"Triumph!—ay, in a field gained against the majesty of Heaven and our own!" exclaimed Alexander, impetuously. "But yet we distinguish!—rebellion with the Orsini is a disease, a healthful exercise with the Vitelli!—let it pass? And now, nephew, hasten to pay your adorations at the shrine of St. Peter, where the Penitentiary will bear your confession, and receive your offering."

"But first, it is most needful that the Orsini induce their friends to retire from Sant'Angelo, and that I provide for the quartering of my troops, lest mischief or confusion happen!" said the duke; an intimation which at such a moment was of peculiar emphasis.

"Hast thou many with thee, Cæsar?" said the pontiff, turning with a vague expression of anxiety and suspicion. "We bade you not burden the city at this time, when we are obliged to open our ancient stores, lest the faithful should lack corn in the land of promise!"

"Chiefly the barons of the Campagna with their retinues, and a sprinkling of honest Catalans," replied Cæsar, carelessly.

"Look you, duke, we will have no quartering on this side Tiber, unless it be beyond the Isle,—and to prevent quarrels, we will make room for the Swiss in the Vatican," continued the pontiff, who had for a moment been lost in thought. "The Cardinal of Sienna will consult with you as to the disposal of the rest."

The duke bowed with a smile of mock deference to the venerable priest. "I am glad your holiness has given me a colleague whose integrity not all the devil showed Our Lord could tempt," he said, relapsing into an air of gloom and sorrow; "For grievous indeed it is to punish traitors with the severity they compel—and my heart yet aches to think of the black ingratitude and treason which I have rewarded in Don Ramir, the podestà, in whom your holiness, the sacred college, and myself trusted so much!"

"The podestà of Romagna!" exclaimed the pontiff, turning slightly pale.

"Has not the news of his treason and punishment ran before us to Rome?" said Cæsar, with affected astonishment.

"What hath happened to him?" demanded the pontiff hastily.

"He is beheaded and quartered—halved, I should say—in Ronciglione! The particulars of his treason I reserve for your holiness's private audience!" returned the duke, with perfect tranquillity.

It was evident that this news was received with a strong internal shock by the pontiff, and the Cardinal of Sienna crossed himself aghast. But suffering few signs of his emotion to appear, Alexander said, after a short pause, "A matter like this brooks no delay—we will hear your reasons instantly: meanwhile, Lord Paolo, return and prevent any occasion of an outbreak, by bidding the Swiss attend us here, and the Vitelli to retire to their quarters."

Then stretching his arms, the whole assembly knelt, and uttering a hasty benediction, the pontiff remounted the staircase followed by the duke and his immediate attendants.

The gorgeous court dissolved as rapidly as the coloured clouds of sunset when the luminary has disappeared; but the Hospitaller watched the departure of the Orsini before he left the palace. He then hastened out, as he imagined, unobservedly, but suddenly his mantle was respectfully touched, and Bembo joined him on the steps of the portico.

"My lord, the Orsini are searching for you everywhere, earnestly desiring your presence in their palace, and have left me on the watch to secure you!" said the canon, breathlessly.

"But, Messer Pietro, I intend not to harbour with the Orsini," replied the prince. "Thou knowest I have an errand—a vow—in this city, which is not likely to be executed in the palace of the betrothed of Lucrezia Borgia!—Tell them that I am fulfilling a sacred obligation of my order—and sacred 'tis! But to my brother, Reginald, say—that even thus unknown, and with the purpose in my heart,—I will not drink the wine of a man who might be—whom the ignorant world might call—my enemy—my rival!"

"Not go to the Orsini palace, where we should be so safe—so royally entertained!" said the canon, ruefully.

"Nay, I mean not to take thee from the flesh-pots, Pietro!" said the knight, smiling: "the rather that thy presence there will serve for a blind to my proceedings; but thou mayest see me at thy pleasure, for I intend to strike my staff at yonder hostelry;—dost thou not mark it in the middle of the square, with the shields of certain Knights of Almaine glittering among the vines of the trellis, and a peasant in a crimson cap dancing with some blue petticoat or another before it?"

"Your highness's prejudices are, then, in nowise shaken?" said the canon, very disappointedly. "So beautiful a lady, too, that Paris would have preferred her to Helen, and given her the apple rather than to Cytherea!"

"'Tis the heavier confirmation—there is no virtue nor villany which such beauty might not cause!" replied the prince, vehemently, but suddenly checking himself with a sigh.

"But, my lord," said the canon, "I have it in charge from the redoubted prince your father, and may not lose sight of you even for the space of a wink. Where you go, I go; and so, lead on, signor!"

"Art thou dealing with a child, or with a man, deemest thou, sir canon?" said the knight, sternly. "Refuse the Orsini if thou wilt, but we may not shelter together, for already I note thou art suspected as an envoy from my father. Thou hast my command, which it is thine to obey, not discuss; and so, a fair good night, Messer Pietro! I am not angry with you, but would be alone."

And turning from him, the knight retraced his way to the place where he had left his horse and squire; but at some distance he looked back, and consoled the canon with a friendly wave of farewell. Perceiving that his dismissal was peremptory, the ecclesiastic determined to make the best of his situation, mounted his mule, and rode towards the palace on the Tiber inhabited by the Duke of Gravina and his son.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Geryon, arise! and Gorgon,
Chimæra, and thou Sphinx, subtlest of fiends,
Who ministered to Thebes Heaven's poisoned wine,
Unnatural love, and more unnatural hate,
These shall perform your task."—SHELLEY.

The masses assembled to witness the entry of the general of the church were gradually dispersing; the nobles and vassals to fortified palaces, the

mercenary soldiers to their quarters, the oppressed but dazzled and satisfied populace to their hovels and desolate homes among the ruins of the grandeur of their marvellous ancestry. As if watching the gradual sinking of the city into calm, two persons slowly paced up and down the ramparts of St. Angelo, on the side beneath the round tower which overlooked the river, one keeping slightly behind with the respect of an inferior, though engaged in an apparently confidential dialogue.

“But stil, my lord, if I migh speak, these illuminations of Santangelo passed the displays of human art!” said Migueloto, for it was he accompanying the Duke of Romagna. “Donna Fiamma affected indeed to use the service of your faithful Gascons and of the Turkish slaves, but there are some who report they saw strange grisly forms of brightness and darkness mingled, which flew about, obeying her behests.”

“Ay, the vulgar deem everything great beyond the power of humanity—measuring it by their own base incapacities!” replied Cæsar. “But if she has discovered secrets!—what then?—Was not Pope Sylvester II. a potent magician? Yea, and Benedict the Ninth, and Gregory the Seventh, and holy Dunstan? But, Migueloto, seeing how I managed mine enemies to-day, deem you that I need the sleeve of Hildebrand from which he shook out thunder and lightning?—or the flute of Benedict, with which he enchanted women to follow him over wilds and wolds, seeing how the lofty spirit of Fiamma bows down before me, like flame indeed beneath a magician’s wand?”

“God’s life! my lord, what hope can she have remaining but from your gracious favour?” exclaimed the captain.

“Yea, and she loves me, pretty soul!” said Cæsar, with a scornful smile; but he added in a darker tone, “And she alone, perchance, of all the beauteous fools who have told me so?—Surely, Migueloto, I am a deep Platonic, seeking as I perpetually do the ideal of beauty, and finding only disappointment in all its forms!”

“Signor, in my opinion, for I am not versed in the schoolmen’s, my lady, Donna Lucrezia, approaches the nearest to the perfection of all loveliness,” said the captain, starting to observe that his superior suddenly paused, as if he had seen a snake in his path.

“Why, thou repeatest a common tale!” he said, almost instantly resuming his pausing, but more rapidly. “Is she not as famous in Italy as Helen in Greece?—Ay, and more than famous—for men’s blame spreads wider than their praise, thou knowest, Migueloto; else how chances it that all thy deeds of arms are outblazoned by thy deeds of guile, for the Romans call you ent-throat ostener than soldier, Migueloto!—But is it not strange that my father, who des’res so earnestly that I should doat on my gewgaw of a bride, encourages Fiamma in her pranks?”

“Is it not strange, too, that Donna Lucrezia is to lodge in the sacred palace?” returned the confidant.

“It shall be stranger yet, if this precaution furnishes not a more blasting mildew than any yet distilled on her renown—alas!” said the duke, and he continued his walk for some time without speaking.

“Where is Fiamma now?” he said at last.

“Practising some incantation with the haggish sisters of the Ghetto, in the tomb,” said Migueloto, glancing at the huge round tower which he thus designated. “I do believe, some love-spell to lure your highness back to your old worship.”

“Then shall I begin to deem they have some science beyond their

father's skill in the black herbs of death, which he left them for an inheritance when he treated himself one day to a draught of one of his own compounds," said Cæsar, gaily. "For indeed I feel as if mine ancient love were rekindling from its ashes in my heart.—Methinks I loved her once, before I loved ambition! But hast thou heard of one whom I bade attend me here in Santangelo, a wizard whose skill mocks theirs to clouds and vapours—one Dom Sabbat?"

"My lord, no,—I have not been many hours captain of Santangelo," returned Migueloto.

"Migueloto," said the duke, suddenly stopping and turning with an expression of fierce scrutiny on his captain, "I think thou dost often strangely mistake me—wherefore deemest thou that I am animated by so persevering and exterminating a hate of these husbands and these wooers of my sister?"

"Because—because—the fiend carry me if I know!—unless that your grace deems all unworthy of your future grandeur," said Migueloto, shuddering beneath the serpent eyes which yet fascinated his own.

"Partly so," replied Cæsar, in a gratified tone: "but also because that the sorcerer—this Dom Sabbat—who showed to me my own imperial fortunes, at the same time raised for me the phantoms of my sister's descendants,—and they were all crowned with diadems, whose glory methought even outglared the lustre of Charlemagne's!—And deem you that I will suffer, if I can prevent it, the wreath which I must acquire with toils and cares so mighty, to pass away from the succession which I hope to leave behind me?"

"It were not reasonable," replied the captain. "But indeed I marvel his holiness is not weary of marrying her to these husbands that die so fast!"

"'Tis no ill means to refute report, and his holiness values the breath of men which they call opinion,—these espousals dazzle the aim of suspicion!" replied Cæsar, with dark significance. "This, at least, I would have all friends of mine reply to conjecturers!—and this Orsini match is to be paraded before the eyes of Christendom. But there may be a deeper policy in it! I have had ill offices done me with his holiness—he takes Remiro's tidings very strangely!—and Lucrezia—but who can give reasons for women's doings? Let the mob believe even the worst they will, for, Migueloto, an emperor and a pope cannot sit throned together in Rone!" but observing the gloom on the superstitious captain's face, he continued: "Tush, man, I am but jesting now—albeit the chair of St. Peter was at first of very plain wood! I would only do what many Christian men have earnestly desired these latter times? What say you, if I called into counsel the ascetic, Lanfranchi, who would strip the church as naked as she was born, and turn her out of Constantine's doors as meek and ragged, holy and beggared, as she entered it? So great a service might win Heaven's pardon for many little malefactions: and besides 'tis in my thought some day to redeem the holy sepulchre from the infidels. And that minds me:—what has become of our Knight Hospitaller all to-day?"

"I know not, signor, I saw him but once in the procession," replied Migueloto.

"'Tis a very silent gentleman—I must have farther news of him," said the Duke, musingly. "A sullen fellow, too!—marked you his ungracious acceptance of Lucrezia's thanks? But, softly, we must take order for the

safety of the city! The good Cardinal of Sienna it seems withdraws his gray beard from our discussions."

"Those tidings of the *double* podestà told well in there," replied Migueloto.

"But also didst thou observe how the Datary started when I communicated the news to *him*?" returned the duke. "He hath done me good service—but wherefore did he start?"

"Unless that he feared the like, having the like treachery in his heart," said the amiable castellain.

"Then had he cause," replied Cæsar.

"Our two she-apothecaries are not, I warrant them, out of their stock of herbs, though there is a brisk trade in them, and the grisly women are said to be so monstrously rich, that but that they are witches too, they had long since been murdered," said Migueloto.

"Ay, but these herbs are dangerous, and require too heavy sums in purchasing the treachery necessary to their administration, to be used on vulgar occasions. The brawlers of Vitelozzo,—the insolent vassals of the Orsini,—merit no such pains. Besides, these sudden deaths are suspected!—I want some stout knaves ready to strike with the open steel, so that folks may lay the blame on chaffering cups,—or to throw a rogue into the Tiber without much splashing—thou knowest some such?"

"My lord, the Cardinal of Sienna has issued a decree of banishment to all the banditti in Rome," said the captain, evasively.

"Why, so has the consistory issued a decree of deposition to all the tyrants of Romagna!" returned the duke, laughing tartly. "Tut, captain, where didst thou find the men who met Lucrezia's last husband on the steps of St. Peter?"

"The bungling villains! that gave him a dozen wounds, yet not one mortal!—and left it for a poor gentleman (but yet a gentleman) of your grace's, to strangle him in his bed, after all!" said the captain, grumbly.

"That minds me,—art thou certain yonder fool of the ceremonies did not note you on that occasion?" said Cæsar. "He is the very ass to listen to a message of state compliment, and was it not with some such folly you got admittance to the boaster's bed of sickness? I do oft mark some strange significance in his eyes!"

"If I thought so!" said Migueloto, with a short but most emphatic pause, during which the throat of the sapient master of the ceremonies ought to have smarted. "But as I persuaded him I came from his holiness—all I did he imagines to be done by an authority which he would as soon think of misdoubting, as one brought direct from Heaven by the archangel Gabriel, with his gold and white wings beating the air into sparkles of silver."

"Thou ravest, Migueloto, or art turned poet!" exclaimed Cæsar, with a derisive smile.

"Nay, my lord, I was but remembering the limning of the Annunciation in the Church of the Hermits of Mount Aventine," replied the matter-of-fact captain.

"Thou rememberest it to a good purpose," returned the duke, absently, "How many wounds didst thou say? It must have made his mother weep to hear the tale,—sad as a grandmother's, when the fox has been in her henroost! But he who had been Lucrezia's husband—who boasted that he would love her so, that she should perforce at last love him, (and 'tis

like enough, for the passion of women is for the most part, Migueloto, but the warm reflection of the flame of ours,—spiritual, mark you, radiance and heat without the material earthiness!—why dost thou stare? Know you not how many hours I wasted, ravelling the subtleties of the angelic and seraphic doctors?)—What were we discoursing?—He had a pretty fancy at a glowing description, that Aragoniar: and, mercy on us! how he would rave of her beauty, till men were faint with rage to hear him prate! And yet I say, did I say it before?—he died not ill in the flush of youth, and wine, and triumph—that husband of Lucrezia!"

"It must have gone nigh to madden her grace's adorers to hear the boy gabble!" said Migueloto, with his disgusting smile.

"They were mad already to be so! but who is sane?—To my thought, few but honest labourers whistling after their ploughs, and puzzling their brains in nowise either with the carcasses or souls of their fellows!" returned Cæsar. "But of what spoke we? Ay, truly,—come—your old friends the banditti?—They are not so completely banished from Rome as thou wouldest have me think."

"Perchance it may be—that John of the Catacombs still lingers in some of his old haunts," said the captain reluctantly, but under the eye of Cæsar even he could not lie.

"I'll warrant, then, he hath as many of his worthy coadjutors at whistle, as might set all Rome in a blaze, and cut throats by the light?"

"More than enow to plunder the whole city, and all the pilgrims in it, if taken at unawares," replied the captain, with a sudden kindling of enthusiasm.

"Why, thou dunderheaded Catalan! what manner of policy were it to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs?" said Cæsar, laughing. "I would but know on what I may depend—in case of the worst—in case the pope persists in his purpose of defeating all my plans, by wedding his daughter to the chief of the rebellious barons!—Marked you how warnly he received him—how mistrustfully me? Some have done me marvellously ill offices with our holy father, whispered, no doubt,—by our Lady, when he cried, 'Welcome, Cæsar!' his eyes were full of recollections of—Francesco!"

"John of the Catacombs might perchance be found by a good pair of eyes, in Rome, for he cannot read, and the edict is posted up in Latin!" said Migueloto, with increasing interest.

"'Tis enough, if we know where to find him at the time of need," replied the duke, thoughtfully. "A tumult raised by them were dangerous. And after this quarrel between the Swiss and Germans, our holy father must see a necessity for my troops to occupy all the chief points of vantage in the city, against the brigands, thou knowest, for John must let us hear the sharpening of his knife. And, Migueloto, all the points of strength but this castle, which we hold as it were merely by a trick of chance, are occupied by his holiness's Spaniards,—good and faithful men, 'tis true,—but not so devoted to us as to save our house from the snare even in despite of its short-sighted chief! — But no more of this—I had something of more instant urgency. Migueloto, 'tis a pity thou hast no scholarship—else thou mightst read this list, furnished me by the Datary, of the names and biding places of the captains or other agents of the black bands who are now in Rome, to obtain remissions for themselves and their brethren, of all the mortal sins, and more than all. a thousand-fold repeated."

"What would such clerkship service me in, my lord?" said Migueloto, somewhat surprisedly.

"Nay, it would only service me, who shall, as it is, be compelled to read it to thee," replied Cæsar, carelessly. "For I would have thee use some secret diligence to understand how these religious freebooters stand affected towards me,—whether any would be willing to join the standard of the church,—in especial of those now in the service of the barons or the lords of Naples,—to obtain full absolution (which shall else be clogged with conditions) and ample pay."

"I know not, signor,—I know not that they would believe me, if I offered more than they already drain out of the lords who employ them," said the captain, dubiously eyeing his chieftain.

"But if those lords were all gone, (and the best of us die some day,) would they not need a new master, and were it not well to be of the first in the market?" replied Cæsar. "Moreover,—canst thou not repeat to them some of the fine songs I have sung to thee—concerning yon shower of ducal bonnets and princes' feathers—golden spurs and earls' baldries—in especial to the Swiss captains, whose beggarly peasant sovereignties give none;—and to the Germans, that bestow so many that every man who is not at the least a belted knight holds himself for wronged and cheated of a birthright?"

"Would your highness have me then to tamper even with his holiness's retainers?" said Migueloto, following at a slower and more reluctant step the sharp exercise of his superior.

"Would your captainship ever desire to be of a loftier title?" returned Cæsar, pettishly. "But what manner of boggling fool art thou?—Dost think I mean to tear up mine own root—for what is Cæsar Borgia but a poor graftling of an aged priest's power? Go to, go to—Dost think that the prime of the church's ministers, the Datary himself, would aid in my projects if they meant aught but the good of the church?"

"Your highness, then, does not mistrust him—for all he started when he heard of Don Remiro's mischance?" said the captain, with the rancour of one favourite against another.

"I look on all that felks are busy at with a hundred eyes," said the duke, quietly; "and that reminds me—I must have a good intelligencer among the Orsini. Poor Agnolo is gone, it seems?"

"Old Gravina was pleased to take it into his head that it was he informed you of his son's intent to visit Rome, and so hung him from his palace weathereock, whence he was taken down but to-day, when they got matters prepared for your triumphant reception," said the captain, laughing drily, and not without some reason.

"This whey-faced lover, his son, will persuade him out of that belief, were it nailed in his mind like a bad coin on a Jew's change-table," said Cæsar. "But meanwhile the poor man is certainly at rest, and we must find some one to supply his place.—That was an excellent artifice of the Greeks, when they maltreated Sinon, and so got him entrance into Troy!—What if thy John of the Catacombs set upon some fellow of my choosing near the Orsini palace, and suffered him to escape into it for refuge?"

"A goodly plan, my lord," replied the captain; "and then, under some pretext of gratitude, to enter that noble family's service?"

"Oh, nimble wit, but thou art apprehensive!" said Cæsar, with a burst of ironical admiration. "It were not amiss, too, that we had one or two more observers about my fair sister, for in this time of universal festival

and far-comers we shall have even as many lovers glistening in her beauty as motes in the sunbeams."

"Nay, my lord, we have never yet been deceived by babbling Fra Biccocco, who learns everything from her confessor, Lanfranchi, on whom he ever attends," said the captain. "I marvel how so wise and so gloomy a man can trust so much to such a shallow-brained, gossiping, wine-bibbing babbler."

"Why so do I!" said Cæsar, in a somewhat startled tone, "And yet, no,—tis a great refreshment for men of dark and melancholy genius to divert their fancies at times with these empty wits, for they are ordinarily also light and volatile as corks in water. Yet is Fra Bruno a monk of strange demeanour, that might have been a bishop, and prefers to be a barefooted friar!"

"Doth not that demonstrate in him, my lord, a poor and grovelling spirit, and by no means to be misdoubted?" said the captain, with the implicit curiosity of one expecting an oracle, which indeed the extraordinary penetration of Cæsar frequently gave forth. "Tis for that reason of his humility and holy unconcern in this world's business, that I ever go to him when my breast hath need of a bitter purgative to be at any rest!"

"Darest thou go to *him* with any secret of mine in thy breast, as thou callest thy fleshly corslet below the steel?" said Cæsar, with sudden fierceness.

"Nay, my lord, for no Christian is bound to confess the sins of another, and all that I do in your grace's service I leave to your reckoning," replied Migueloto, in a timid or rather frightened tone.

"Do as thou wilt, for that," said Cæsar, pacified by the avowal of this strange principle of morality. "But thou art right in thinking either that this Dominican is without ambition, or hath so much that all the gratifications yet offered to it are beneath its aim!—Enough of that: I will find fellows to creep about where I would have them! But, hark thee, captain, I would have thee, when thou art again fearful to forget thy sins in their multitude, to carry them to some other confessional than Lanfranchi's,—for I do misdoubt that thy peccadilloes are so closely inwoven with mine that thou must occasionally show the woof by the threads,—and the fox needs but half a cackle!"

"But, my lord, I cannot sleep at times!" said Migueloto, imploringly.

"Then lie awake, and plot more mischief, like thy betters!" returned the duke, jocosely. "Tut, man, go to some jolly, round-faced friar, like Fra Biccocco, who lives and will let live, and sets men on no such foolish penances as I have seen thee perform standing in frozen steel of a winter's night, muttering thy paternosters to the crows on the ramparts."

"But it seems to do my soul good, my signor, and I feel no comfort when I am set to easy shrift; for sins like mine, they know not their trade that pardon on a small matter," said the pious captain of Santangelo.

"Soul!—dost thou believe in these monkish dreams, and darest to be the thing thou art?" returned Cæsar, with sudden impatience. "But," he added with a sardonic smile, "thou hast not been with me in the schools of Padua, where they weigh, and sift, and decompose what thou callest soul—thought—brain—into dust and lime and water."

"What avails that, my lord, when none of them can compound again, long-bearded doctors though they be, dust, and lime, and water, into what I call brain—thought—soul?" replied the captain, sorrowfully.

"Why, now, thou talkest not altogether like a thick-skulled Catalan as

thou art!" said the duke, somewhat staggered by this reply. "But my beauteous Fiamma's spell works. Go then and set the watch. I will in to greet her with a soldier's kiss, an she coy me not, which is ever woman's trick when she hath her own wishes before her, like fiends evoked by a fearful magician."

"Shall I warn her of your highness's approach?" said the captain.

"No, no: I never send heralds to bid folks be in readiness to cheat me—which women besides but rarely need," returned the duke; who, like all rogues past, present, and to come, was an infinite vilifier of the fair descendants of Eve.

He then leisurely ascended a flight of narrow steps up a bastion of the tower, and entered at a still narrower doorway, followed by Don Migueloto de Murviedro.

Passing through a series of apartments furnished in a style of massive but antique grandeur,—perhaps with relics of the magnificence of the two profligate women who in the tenth century lorded over Rome from this fortress, or of the Orsini who had usurped it as their own during the eleventh and twelfth: the duke and his captain descended by a succession of winding stairs and corridors, which communicated with similar suites used for various purposes of residence or imprisonment. All the principal points of access or egress to these chambers were now guarded by sentinels from the Borgian guard, whose remote lamps and the gleam of the bright night sky through deep shafts rather than windows, perforated in the thickness of the walls, afforded the only light which they thought proper to use.

"Who are thy chief prisoners!—Hast thou yet had time to inquire?" said the duke, as they descended through these dark labyrinths.

"I am not, I trow, to consider my lady Fiamma as one, albeit she be imprisoned on so heinous an accusation that being a nun she became the infidel sultan's leman?" said Migueloto, with a grin, the sneering malignity of which was concealed by the gloom, or he had not dared to indulge his features in it.

"That is as I shall find her humour disposed: for I will have no whimpering wantons wailing after me," returned the duke. "But go on—who lodges above?"

"Jacomo Caetano, the apostolic protonotary, brother to Nicholas, that was strangled by your lordship's justice at Sermoneta," replied the captain. "They say he is crazed, and spends the whole livelong day with his hooked nose at the bars of his chamber, looking up to Heaven, as if he expected some visitor thence."

"Let him look on: there is enough of the blue sky for us all to stare at," replied Cæsar. "But where does Monsignor Florida keep his state, that forged the dispensation for the heiress of Portugal to wed,—or doth he deny it as obstinately as ever?"

"He retracts his confession, my lord, into which he says he was cajoled by your grace's emissary, under terror of torture and death."

"The more shame to him that yielded!—But what music is that we hear, which seems to come from the grottoes to our left?" said Cæsar.

"'Tis the musician Tomasino, who, for the love of his lady, Caterina Sforza, whom your lordship was then besieging in Forli, endeavoured the sacrilegious murder of his holiness with poisoned letters," returned Migueloto. "They have left him his flute, and as the grottoes are dark as night nearly all day, he has no other amusement but to play on it."

“What say you!—Tomasino, and alive!” exclaimed Cæsar.

“His holiness was pleased to spare his life in consideration of the eminent courage he showed in attempting his own, for the sake of his native town and mistress!” returned the captain.

“He breathes into his reed so utter a hopelessness and anguish that to gibbet him were to do him a kindness—so let the sacrilegious paricide live on!” said the Borgia. “But this place is very dark, my Migueloto, and by the cold damp air I should say we were nigh the entrance to some cavern or vault.”

“We shall have light enough soon, my lord, although certes it were not ill if I returned above for a lamp, that you might see the curious devices on the walls,” said Migueloto, with a slight shudder. “This is the gallery which leads to the sepulchral chamber of the emperors, where we shall find Donna Fianima, for there she chiefly pursues her studies in the black art, and, as they say, can raise the devil at her will—all holy saints keep us from harm, and absolve our wretched souls!—But there are not wanting some who aver that she has made the great stone head in the corridor speak, and brought the ghost of Emperor Adrian out of his stone coffin, whose lid no earthly force can open!”

“Lead on, lead on, and cease thy nursery babble,” said Cæsar, in a contemptuous tone, which, despite the vigour of his mind and his scepticism, was assumed, for the general belief in magic and necromancy was, as we have seen, abundantly shared by that strangely compounded intellect. But at the same moment one of the sudden suspicions natural to so dark a fancy struck him, that perhaps his captain meditated some treachery, and was leading him into the reach of ambushed assassination! He started back—drew his dagger—and but that at the instant he beheld a distant glow in the ground of the earthen gallery, round and deep, as if arising from a well, the worthy captain himself might have been in no better plight than the imperial ghost whose enforced re-appearances he had alluded to.

“Return and bring me a lamp; yonder light will guide me the rest of my way,” said Cæsar, concealing his dagger in his cloak as he brushed past the captain, who with a profound bend, which was scarcely to be discerned in the murky twilight, obeyed.

CHAPTER XVII.

“There is a snake in thy smile, my dear;
And a bitter poison within thy tear.”—SHELLEY.

Cæsar proceeded with cautious steps and keen glances forward to the place of radiance, the gallery gradually becoming illuminated with a red reflection, which glowed on the lofty walls, covered in parts with hieroglyphics and rich carvings in marble, in others defaced, and revealing the granite foundations of the pile. The mutilated remains of many of the mysterious forms of Egyptian superstition gave a terrible and preternatural aspect to the ruins around, and marked the origin of that colossal and gloomy magnificence which distinguishes all the labours of Adrian, and is alike to be discovered in the ruins of his palace and of his tomb. The unchangeable nature of man might have been bitterly bemused by a

philosopher who had marked the scornful glance with which Cæsar surveyed the ruins of a grandeur meant to be perpetual—himself at the same time devoured by an ambition which perhaps the possession of the tomb-maker's empire could not have satisfied!

A circular hole now appeared in the earth, resembling a well of light; but a massive pillar of granite arose in its centre, into which the arches of the vaulted chamber below converged, and so intricately, that it was some moments before Cæsar discerned that the pillar was hollow, and set with steps which wound like a corkscrew in it, and doubtless down to the vault. Meanwhile he was occupied in considering the extraordinary scene below, as visible through the ruined dome which had once covered this *sanctum sanctorum* of grandeur, the sepulchre of the masters of the world.

At a considerable depth below appeared an extensive chamber, excavated seemingly in the volcanic rock on which the foundations of the castle are laid, vast masses of which, wrought with hieroglyphics and the mystic ornaments of Egyptian architecture, reposed on the heads of gigantic caryatides hewn in the solid rock, whose features bore that expression of malicious and mocking profoundity remarkable in Egyptian statues, and which seems to conceal an explanation of the great enigmas of human existence. Behind these colossal guardians of the secrets of death—to judge by the hollow darkness—extended grottoes or subterraneous corridors.

A great fire, apparently of innocuous flames, for it burned with extraordinary splendour in a gigantic sarcophagus without emitting smoke or consuming a figure of wax which reposed in the midst of it, shed lurid glares from the summit of a kind of altar, supported by couching sphinxes. Cæsar smiled, but not without some secret inquietude, when he imagined he recognised in this fire-wrapped form a very strong resemblance to his own person and features.

On the breast of the figure was a skull, in which was a substance resembling either a human heart or that of some animal of similar organization, recently torn from the breast in which it had been wont to beat. Two ancient bags were busied in continually ladling this skull full of the beautiful flames in the sarcophagus, or in feeding them with strange ingredients which were heaped in their reach. Phials of eastern configuration were there, filled with curious oils, naphtha, and fluids unknown to the modern pharmacopœia, inventions chiefly of Arabian and Greek chemists in the pursuit of sciences abhorred then, and despised now, and which were supposed to possess magic or cabalistical virtues known only to the initiated. Bundles of herbs, chiefly of the dreary plants alien to human life, which grow in churchyards or in ruins, such as hemlock, nightshade, ivy, vervain, and yew, were mingled with the most precious drugs of remote lands, of India and of Iceland. Mosses covered with the froth of an insect which was then supposed to be raised by the direct influence of the moon; glittering dust of gold and pounded diamonds; a multitude of still stranger ingredients, such as bats, hearts of doves, snakes, lizards, toads, select portions of other reptiles and of ferocious beasts; a pile of what seemed to be *eyes*; the head of a mummy, which one of the haggard attendants occasionally rasped into a fine powder over the supplies of fuel; and an infinite variety of the most beautiful flowers, composed the extraordinary preparations.

The malicious and enigmatical faces of the sphinxes and caryatides,

which brightened and darkened with the wavering of the flames, as if at times about to utter their secrets, relapsing as suddenly into profound and impenetrable gloom,—seemed rather a repetition than a contrast to the living countenances of the two weird women who superintended the rite. Cæsar immediately recognised in them two female apothecaries. Jewesses of the Ghetto, commonly styled Notte and Morta—Night and Death,—as well from the indistinct traditions which yet survived in the popular mind of the properties of those ancient divinities, as from peculiarities in their personal appearance. Both were tall and large-boned: both aged, and yet of remarkable bodily strength and agility; both hideously ugly: but Notte's skin was of a singularly dark leaden colour, and Morta's framework of mortality was so gauntly developed and fleshless that she resembled a breathing skeleton, and amply answered the idea raised by her designation.

It was currently reported in Rome, that the oldest inhabitant remembered these women old in his youth. Their real name was unknown, or forgotten in the universality of their nicknames, to which they themselves answered without hesitation or apparent dislike. Their father was said to have been a Jewish physician of transcendent skill, which he was supposed to owe to a compact with the fiend, who, after serving him for a certain number of years, deserted him and suffered him to fall into abject poverty. Some indeed did not scruple to assert that the devil himself was the parent of these sisters, who, after instructing them in many hellish arts, set them up with an ample stock of poisonous drugs, and left them to make the best of it.

More enlightened or more sceptical persons, however, there were, who disbelieved in this legend, or explained it by the fact that, in his old age, the sage had betaken himself to the study of the occult sciences, and in their toilsome pursuit had worn out both his intellect and his wealth. In these sciences he was said to have had for indefatigable pupils and co-labourers his two daughters, who thus acquired their skill in drugs and chemicals, and, if report might be trusted, in darker and criminal arts. He left them extremely destitute, to all appearances, at his death, but it was now generally believed that, although continuing to live in a state of abject poverty, the sisters were possessed of great wealth—the profits of their unearthly traffic. It was wonderful that, with this mingled reputation, they had hitherto escaped the notice of the ecclesiastical tribunals especially appointed to take cognizance of such delinquencies. It was muttered that they had powerful though secret protectors, to whose vengeance their accursed arts had been serviceable; and as everything evil was supposed to have some natural alliance with the Borgias, it was rumoured that the rapacious Datary himself had been several times restrained from laying his inquisitorial hands upon them, by Cæsar's interposition. If so, they owed to science what might be considered to counterbalance the great injury it had inflicted upon them in causing the peculiar hideousness of their countenances and persons, for it was said that the old physician, their father, by a failure in a wonderful elixir, which he had concocted and given to their mother, in the confidence that it would render her unborn offspring extremely beautiful, caused her death and the untimely birth of a pair of frightful twins.

But Cæsar's eye scarcely glanced over these fearful and disagreeable objects, ere it rested on a form which, although not without a mixture of the terrible in its beauty, displayed even in its disorder of apparel and

look much to attract the gaze of the sensual Borgia. It was a woman of fine stature, her features carved with the sculpturesque regularity which Roman beauty still retains, and distinguished by a haughty and fiery expression, suiting a descendant of the ancient masters of the world. She was attired in a long black robe, girdled with a silver serpent, loosened as if to allow room for the tempestuous heavings of her bosom, whose purple veins swelled full with every breath she drew. She lay in an attitude at once expressive of enforced resignation and ravening impatience, on the steps of the sarcophagus, gazing wildly around, starting at every crackle or flash of the flames, sometimes upbraiding the hags with the slow progress of the incantation, at others snatching up an open volume beside her, emblazoned with strange figures and characters, and reading in a distracted and hurried tone the directions which apparently it contained for the due performance of the spell. She had dashed away her silver diadem, and the masses of large sable rings in which her hair fell on her naked shoulders revealed and heightened their perfect contour and whiteness. The expression of the countenance was at once celestial and fiendish; the distortions of contending passions, hope and despair, love and hatred, at times rendered it diabolic with all its great beauty, at others sunk it into what was perhaps its habitual cast—that of the pride and supernatural melancholy of a fallen seraph.

“He comes not, he comes not, and ye do but mock me with your mad mutterings and powerless herbs!” she exclaimed, as Cæsar gazed. “He is even now clasping his bride to his heart, and assuring her of his love, and upbraiding his long absence from her arms,—and gives not a thought—not a sigh—not one recollection to the all-abandoned Fiamma! And why should he? What charm have I to lure him back!—what spell is there in a beauty of which he was wearied ere he left me for accursed France!—a beauty which sorrow, and disgrace, and infamy have ravaged—ay, and time, and time, and time—for I am aged with grief!—nay, and how many years, think ye, I am older, friends, than this royal toy of Navarre?”

“Nay, daughter, when thou art as old as Notte it will be time enough to reckon years!” returned the dark-skinned sybil, lithening the stiff folds of a viper in a blue oil, which cast out a noisome perfume as she stirred it. “Fie, how the essence of wolf’s bones stinks in the nostrils!”

“She is but seventeen summers old, and I have been miserable three and twenty winters!” continued the lady, in a tone of profound and utter desolation. “No more, no more, my friends! Leave me to die; what have I to do to live?”

“Tis worth staying in this world were it merely to keep out of the other, daughter!” said the beldame of the skeleton carcass in a strange whistling voice, and with a grin which showed her white but deformed and unnaturally numerous teeth. “But for beauty—when thou art as lean and chapless as Morta—then mayest thou lament over thy vanished loveliness!”

“And wert thou of a fair presence once, Morta?” said Donna Fiamma, gazing at her with wild and yet absent earnestness.

“As my sister yonder—before the Inquisition (curse on every stone of it!) seized me and famished me, hanging by one hand, with the tip of my foot but a breath of air above the ground, to make me confess how I got my livelihood!” replied the hag. “It was before Cæsar’s time, lady,—time out of mind,—and all who adjudged me are in hell, whither my curses continually follow them and stir the flames; and I am here. But what can repay me for being so withered and old before my time?”

And she looked with a malignant and envious leer at the beautiful Roman, who certainly scarcely noticed that she was speaking, or only so far as to understand that she had ceased.

"Thou lying book, and still more lying prophet!" she exclaimed, dashing the mysterious volume from her. "If the spell of love is over, what is there in magic that can replace its power?—But doth the traitor think to trample on me thus?—O, Cæsar! thou hast made me a demon, but look that I prove not one that shall tear its maker into pieces!"

The sisters looked at each other, exchanged smiles such as serpents might give, and remused their toils.

A silence of some moments followed, during which Fiamma leaned her burning cheek on her hand, and gazed with eager and devouring eyes on the glowing sarcophagus.

"An emperor's dust is calcining there; what can the pride of the Son of Morning require more?" she said at length, in a melancholy musing tone.

"I told thee, daughter, that the heart should be taken from a living man, and not a dead deer!" said Morta, shaking her long skinny finger emphatically at the contents of the skull.

"Thou talkest now, indeed, mother, remorselessly as that death whose name thou bearest!" said Fiamma, with a convulsive shudder. "We have done all hitherto by the very letter and command of Dom Sabbat, and the book he gave me."

"Dom Sabbat!—for my part I would so great a master as he reports himself would take the trouble and shame of his own failures!" said Notte, peevishly, and looking for approbation to her sister, in whom she recognised the superiority which her clearer intellect, sharpened and embittered by sufferings and wrongs more terrible, conferred.

"Yea, sister, we are not to blame if Borgia comes no nearer the Colonnas to-night than entering their palace, in which a Colonna dare not be found for his head!" returned the malignant crone.

"A Colonna! a Colonna! Oh! that there were any saint in heaven to whom I dared shriek for mercy!" exclaimed the miserable lady, throwing herself with violence on the sphinxes' steps in a tearless agony of despair.

"Yield not thus hastily, daughter," said Notte, perhaps somewhat touched or alarmed by the excess of this silent anguish. "Albeit we fail with this spell of thy unknown Magus, we may do better with one of our own which is in our father's books—the wisest and the greatest since Zoroaster compelled the sun to stand still in heaven during a year of days and nights!—Be but patient—patient—patient!"

"We must have a warm human heart—not a cold deer's!" said Morta, contemptuously.

"Take your brass sickle, and tear out mine, for 'tis on fire in my breast!" said Fiamma ravingly, and pointing to an instrument which, in obedience to the traditions of the craft, the sisters used in gathering their herbs.

Again they exchanged their mysterious but dreadful smile, and continued their labours in silence, interrupted only by the disconsolate sighs and moanings of Fiamma.

At last, either wearied with these expressions of anguish, or that the grand moment of projection had arrived, Morta made a sign to her sister.

"We must now burn the heart in naphtha and frankincense!" she said. "Thou, daughter, put on the wreath of purple nightshade, and with bare

feet, and scattering flowers, walk continually around the sarcophagus, singing love-songs in a sweet and persuasive voice, until we bid you desist, when he will appear, or Dom Sabbat, adept of the Arabian school though he be, is a fool and a liar!"

The Roman lady arose listlessly and despairingly, and while the hags mumbled and assisted one another in preparing their drugs and fluids over the fiery sarcophagus, she slowly and hopelessly collected a heap of flowers in her arms, and bound her brows with the gloomy garland indicated by the weird woman. Not a movement of this drama was lost upon the unseen spectator, and although it is probable that the passion which the Roman beauty so wildly displayed for him excited rather his contempt than emotion, the tyrannical voluptuary could not be altogether insensible to its warmth. Still he resolved to mortify the sorceresses, and prove the futility of their spell by not appearing until they had exhausted it, and despaired of success.

The hags had now completed their preparation, and the heart appeared surrounded by a pure flame of naphtha ; and while they continued heaping it with frankincense, Fiamma commenced her perambulation, scattering flowers, and singing with a voice which, however wild and troubled, was of a passionate and melting harmony ; and with a frenzied fervour that gave her the aspect and inspired effulgence of beauty which would have befitted a Delphic sybil, she chaunted the following lines :—

THE INCANTATION.

By all the joys that we have shared,
By all the wrath that we have dared,
By all we are—and should not be—
By the despair and ecstasy !
The anguish and intolerable bliss
Of that moment—and of this !—
By the guilt and the rapture,
The triumph and the woe,
By the Heaven we have offended,
By the Hell that yawns below,
Come to the embrace which thou shouldst never know !

Spirits, that do his behest
Whom our love pleases best !
Bear on some wooing breeze
The lights which flood the soul like purple seas,
And burning memories of the times that were,
Like the all-melting warmth of sunset's golden air :
Remember him how first we met !
Remember him—alas ! who could forget,—
The terror and delight
Of that first pressure—slight
As music ruffling the still waves,
When our lips trembled together,
Like two rosebuds in summer weather.
Fanned by warm wafts,—or waters that join their mutual laves !
Recall to him that moment which we dare not name,
When they met deliriously, in mingling flame,
And all was lost but the delight without measure,
Which perished with its own excess of pleasure !

But if love may not move,
Nor all the untravelled tracks of joy we yet might prove,
Yet—by the deep damnation we must share,
By our eternal despair,
By the doom which circles us in allwhere,
Which is only hell when parted,
Albeit together broken-hearted !—
By the hatred in the eyes of men
Who smile,—but most do loathe us then,—
Come, come, come to mine arms,
By these, or by whatever are of more prevailing charms !

As she sung, the voluptuous and affecting recollections kindled by her words, the melody of her voice, her beauty, her despair, the intoxicating vapour of the drugs, roused Cæsar's passions into flame. In the delirium and enthusiasm of returning love,—if love we may dare to call it,—Cæsar forgot all his determinations and desire to disappoint the beldame sisters. He entered the winding hollow of the pillar, and turning round and round with giddy rapidity, descended, and arriving at the exit at the very instant when the flames of the naphtha expired, the song ceased, and Fiamma had halted like a figure suddenly transformed into stone,—he leaped into the chamber. One wild shriek, and she had rushed into his arms, while the hags, after a momentary pause of surprise, clapped their withered hands in congratulation. Showers of tears, amidst wild laughter, sobs, sighs, kisses delirious with passion and joy, a million broken exclamations of delight and despair, love and reproach, embraces which in their frantic ardour overstepped or despised all the limits of female reserve,—betrayed the convulsive reaction in the soul of the despairing sorceress.

“And didst thou deem any other spell necessary to lure me back to thee, than the memory of thy beauty and our past happiness!” said Cæsar, when this sunny hail-shower had begun to slacken, and kissing away the tears which continued to flow over the now crimsoning cheeks.

“Nay, Cæsar, nay!—I but desired to hear thee say thou hast not utterly abandoned me, love!—to know that I am not altogether alone in the universe in the presence of that God whom I have betrayed!” exclaimed the hapless lady of Santangelo. “Tell me but—but—that thou dost not despise and loathe me as I do myself! Remember that although I have lost all—I have lost all for thee! Remember that I was the bride of Christ—the daughter of Colonna, innocent, happy, loved,—remember what I was once and am now,—a wretch under the malediction of Heaven and of earth,—of the Celestial Spouse whom I have abandoned,—of the illustrious name I have darkened,—remember all the oaths thou hast broken,—remember that—oh, what have I not suffered and lost for thee—and can I, can I, Cæsar, forgive thee ever?—do aught but hate and curse thee, and wear out my soul in imprecations on thy head?”

“Curse on, then, loveliest: for my part I will kiss!” said Cæsar, renewing his caresses. “But dost thou too reproach me with my miseries, for I trow thy woman's frenzy is running now on this ill-starred and unwilling marriage of mine with the silly French girl of Navarre?”

“Yes, traitor—yes, fathomless betrayer!” exclaimed Donna Fiamma, with sudden fury, and tearing herself from his embrace. “And darest thou with that unblushing front—thus carelessly—speak of that consummation of all perfidy—that perjury unmatched—which alone shall damn thee below the blackest fiends of hell—the betrayers of a thousand generations of men? Villain, villain, villain!—is this thy pledge sworn by oaths which made the stars turn pale,—that thou would make me thy wife,—thy queen—the Empress of Italy?”

Notte smiled, and began mumbling in her teeth, but Morta breathlessly signed to her not to interrupt a conversation so much to her malign and misanthropic taste.

“I remember the occasion well,” said Cæsar, in a cajoling and yet ironical tone. “Thou mindest me well, my bright Fiamma! We were in the vineyard of the gloomy Carmelites, where they had imprisoned thee; I was the cardinal Valentino then, thou wert the nun Maddelena: I was leading

thee to my ladder of ropes on the walls where good old Aliberto trained his choicest figs for my lady abbess's own dish; and thou wert as reluctant as an it were leaving paradise, weeping and turning thy lustrous neck towards the stony walls, what could I but promise? But was it for an intellect like thine, which unites the greatest qualities of man's even with the most passionate and wayward of woman's, to believe me, or to deem that Heaven would ratify an oath by w'hich we swore to make us perjurors to itself?"

"But hell, at least, confirmed it, Cæsar!—thou art absolved from thy priestly shackles,—thou art on thy way, if thy soul quail not, to that empire which I was to have shared,—which a barbarian girl—sprung from the deadliest enemies of Italy—the deepest-dyed in her blood—shall mount with thee, it seems!" returned Fiamma, with a slight pause at the conclusion, not unnoticed by the subtle Borgia.

"Yea, Fiamma, yea, my soul's soul!—I have mounted, and ever by thy means, until my foot is now on the first round of empire!" he said, fixing his eyes with a passionate and mournful expression on the lady. "And wouldest thou dash me down again,—dispel the vision just as its brightness is hardening into a reality as brilliant as if raised in solid diamond? And wherefore?—a woman's phantasy!—an unreasoning jealousy fit only to be entertained by one of thy sex's common sort, above whom thy glorious and heroic spirit set thee ever as a star over the sparkles of a camp watch-fire,—who, indeed, might smile where thou wilt weep to hear me say that, whoever properties this poor casket of my soul, the gem is thine,—thine only,—and, despite of all appearances to the contrary, never, for an instant, has it wavered in its faith to thee!"

"Art thou not this princess's husband?—Or what liars are those who sent us the news of thy gorgeous nuptials in Orleans?" returned Fiamma, wildly. "Traitor, traitor!—But I will not pass away without my vengeance—and wouldest that then I might sink into the nothingness from which I have only been evoked to suffer!"

"What canst thou do, Fiamma?" said Cæsar, smilingly. "If I had feared thy vengeance on thy French rival,—if I had not known that seeing her *thou* wouldest know that my soul, which has been twined in fire with thine, could not mingle with that watery phantom's of vapour,—if I had loved her,—deem you I had trusted her in this city, without commands to keep thee in reality a prisoner, as thou art in name?"

"And art thou assured that thy commands could have been obeyed!—Have I not brought thee hither by a spell, thou cruel, thou unmerciful betrayer!" said Fiamma, with eyes that sparkled at once with tears and fury. "And could not one of equal power belike have rescued me from thy castle and thy myrmidons' clutch?"

"Now, by holy Peter! I swear I do believe thou hast a spell—and one irresistible!" returned Cæsar, seizing the indignant beauty, and clutching her, despite her struggles and wrath, in a fierce embrace. "But have I not one over thee?—Dost thou not love me, my Fiamma?—Hast thou not lost heaven itself for me?—Art thou not the talisman of my power and of my glory, for without thy love to reward, thy courage to prompt, thy zeal to second, were I not still a whining priest cursing the altars at which he kneels? Moreover, love, thou art so wholly mine that thou canst in no way harm me without harming thyself a thousand-fold!"

"And deemest thou, Cæsar, that I fear aught which thy power, or thy sire's, or all mankind's, can do against me?" said the lady, with a smile of supernatural despair. "What if I had yielded to the impulse that urged

me, as if with an angel's fiery sword, to rush out of my prison, and proclaim thy crimes in the presence of the whole Christian world, assembled before St. Peter's tomb?—They would have believed me there!"

"What would they have believed?—'Tis indeed not altogether incredible in this land of Boccaccio, that a priest might err, or a youthful nun discover that the blood in her veins flowed something warmer than melting ice," said Cæsar, tranquilly. "But thou knowest, shouldst thou adventure to revive that ancient charge against me, there is thine own confession on record before the tribunal of the Holy Office, confirmed by the pagan sultan, whose leman thou didst avow thyself, before so many witnesses!"

"To shield thee from the just infamy of thy crime—to baffle the vengeance of my noble uncles—the brothers of my dead father!" replied Fiamma, vehemently. "Oh, Prospero and Fabrizio!—what heavier vengeance need you impigate on my guilty head! Oh, aged Colonna, my grandsire, thy curse is now exhausted! Hopeless days and sleepless nights!—remorse, and terror, and despair, and desolation for ever around me! Oh, needed it this, thy last irrevocable treason, betrayer! to fill to overflowing the cup of my bitterness?"

"Wherefore, then, didst thou not tarry with thy heathen saviour, as thou went wont to call the vile worshipper of Mahound, who gave thee shelter in that troubrous hour?" said Cæsar, darkening into livid paleness. "I trow, if all the truth were known, I had but little cause to laud myself on his generosity in taking upon him a b'ame which nothing harmed him, and welcoming to his seraglio beauty like thine, while the storm rattled over me alone, and no man was deceived, save the fool, perchance, who trusted his treasure to the keeping of a robber!"

"Thou sayest not this, Cæsar, as meaning it,—thou dost not,—thou darest not!" said Fiamma, with rekindling fury. "And yet the noble Turk died—as those whom thou hatest are wont to die!—Oh, if he perished by thy treachery, and not by thy father's cruelty and avarice sold to the imperial murderer, his brother,—why then, Cæsar, why then!—But 'tis impossible!—Oh, God? let this at least be impossible!—And yet thou hadst a brother, too; once!—Cæsar! I but desired thy presence to tell thee how I hated, loathed, despised thee!—to bid thee farewell for ever!"

"Shall we remove the image, daughter, or close it up in the marble, as Dom Sabbat bade us, to preserve thy lover ever loving, and bring him continually back to thine arms like a bird to its nest?" said Morta, with a hideous grin of scorn and malice, her serpent eyes overflowing with fiendish delight and cunning.

"Pardon me, gorgon mothers, for not previously baring my head to your furyships!—But what sayest thou, love!—my own Fiamma!—what shall the grisly mothers do?" said Cæsar, gazing with eyes fraught with fire on his beautiful victim.

Shame and passion, pride and disdain struggled for some instants in her haughty bosom, and alternately whitened and crimsoned her gorgeous complexion, like the rose and snowy lights of an Alpine sunset. But it was not hard to predict which emotion would triumph in the tempestuous spirit of the fond Italian, and sinking in an agony of shame and love in the betrayer's arms, the weird sisters seemed to need no further instructions. While Cæsar poured forth a torrent of passionate assurances and loving upbraiding of her doubts, they proceeded, by the

operation of some unseen mechanical agency, muttering divers recondite spells, to cover the sarcophagus with a lid which seemed to belong to it. When this was completed, Note melted some lead in an earthen pot of naphtha, and they proceeded to solder it up, with many additional rites and ceremonies.

“Thou triumphest, Caesar, thou triumphest!—But, man, thou art mistaken in me!—I desire henceforth to be only thy friend,—thy counsellor if thou wilt,—but lover never more!” she said, starting up with a new outbreak of womanly wrath and shame. “Leave me now, my heart is sufficiently comforted. I have seen thee—I know thou dost not hate me!—’Tis enough; return to thy bride—to thy home—leave me to my despair—to my lonely anguish!—I will watch thee to thy palace from my towers,—and as the last torch vanishes in its gates, I shall know that although thy bride stand there to meet thee, thou art remembering that in those halls of my fathers, thou didst first behold me, an innocent child at my grandsire’s feet—wreathing a garland of flowers in my careless joy to deck the gray hairs which I was to bring with sorrow and disgrace to the tomb!”

Even Caesar Borgia was touched with this melancholy recollection.

“Nay, loveliest!—my first and only love!—even by the memory of that delicious past! I will not leave thee till thou hast sworn to love me as faithfully and wholly as then!” he said, vehemently. “And hear me, when in return I swear to thee, by all my hopes of sovereignty and vengeance!—the moment the necessity of keeping the favour of the detested French is over, I will send them their foolish gewgaw back, and keep to thee far, far more than ever I have sworn, and then, indeed, shalt be my wife, my queen, my empress, and share with me the diadem of Italy!”

Weeping, but listening not unsoothedly to the flattering sounds, Fiamma murmured some scarcely articulate words to the busy hags, to which, however, they nodded assent. With an irresolute glance at Caesar, she yet suffered him to follow her in the ascent of the pillar, but so rapidly she went, that not being accustomed to its giddy gyrations, he was left considerably in the rear. On reaching the summit, he was surprised to find Migueloto there with a torch,—but Fiamma had vanished.

“Where is Donna Fiamma?—Hast thou not seen her pass, Migueloto?” he exclaimed.

“My lord, no!” returned the captain, much startled. “Yet I have been awaiting your excellency here a tedious hour.”

“But this is strange!” said Caesar, with a momentary feeling of superstitious awe. “It would almost seem that she hath discovered the secret of walking invisible!—And, in truth, there must needs be some magic in her spell, for scarcely in the maddest days of my love for her, did her coyish pranks so irk me as now! I will not leave the castle till I have found her.”

“’Tis looking for a seed in a pomegranate, my lord, if she is bent to the contrary,” said Don Migueloto. “And I must needs remind your grace, that the great company which awaits to welcome you to your new palace, have already surpassed all patience in their courteous attendance.”

“State affairs—state affairs—thou knowest, captain, have detained us! Lend me thy torch, this capricious girl shall not thus sport with the flames she sets to the hearts of others!” returned the chief, impatiently; and snatching the torch, he began his explorations with an eagerness and

perseverance which was long before it yielded to Migueloto's convictions of their uselessness. It was easily ascertained that she could not have retired to her own apartments, for none of the sentinels, whom she must have passed, had seen the least signs of such an apparition.

“She hath indeed discovered a spell which, by our Lady! had she known earlier, might have kept me enslaved much longer than as it befel?” said the duke, at last, with mingled vexation and emotion. “But look to it, captain, that I find her in sight at my next visit,—or I shall deem thou art in the trick too! And bid her summon her Dom Sabbat,—or rather mine,—for he must needs be of some wonderful skill, in a science in which I am curious—no more! So stare not with thy stony eyes—but learn to obey without thinking too much on what thou hast but to put in act.”

And with this admonition, Cæsar unwillingly prepared to quit the fortress.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ *Va col pensier cercando in mille modi
Non creder quel ch' al suo dispe to crede.*”—ARIOSTO.

And with a thousand crafty turns of thought,
He strives not to believe what still he must.

Meanwhile the canon hastened to the Orsini palace, sorrowfully revolving the obstinacy of his young lord, but not altogether discontent to be out of the way of the perils in which his strange purposes were likely to involve him. After the destruction of the Colonna family, the Orsini had undoubtedly become the chief of the Roman nobility, a preeminence for which they had struggled for ages with that house. And now, enriched with a large portion of the plunder of the Colonnas, and by their numerous alliances and possessions, equalling many of the inferior princes of Italy, the wonder that they should resist the power of the Borgias, changes into one, that the Borgias could make head against theirs.

But little was wanting to make the grandeur of the Orsini sovereign. The immense circuit of their palace, and the contiguous district, were crowded with their armed adherents. Numerous bands of foreign mercenaries surrounded them, and the followers of several of the great barons by whose aid they had so successfully resisted the attempts of Cæsar, now swelled their usual force to that of an army. Among these, the canon found the burly Vitellozzo, and a company more congenial to his refined and intellectual tastes in the persons and retinues of Pier de' Medici, and Guidobaldo, duke of Urbino, one of the most distinguished guests, whose little court was then famous as the Athens of Italy, and who possessed a principality, the strength and remoteness of which had enabled its possessors for ages to refuse all but a nominal submission to the Holy See. The duke was rendered yet more obnoxious to Alexander personally, as the nephew of his most bitter and active enemy, the cardinal Julian della Rovere, afterwards pontiff under the name of Julius II.

The canon was received by the Orsini with the cordiality due to one of the deliverers of their heir, and deep regret was expressed by all at the determination of the Knight of St. John, although with a somewhat enforced warmth by Paolo himself. The chief branches of this great family now consisted of the Duke of Cravina, his brother, the Archbishop of Florence,

and two sons, beside Paolo, one of whom was a cardinal, the other a young and delicate boy. The duke and his brother might be taken as the last representatives of an order of things which was rapidly passing away. The former, a man well stricken in years, but still animated by fierce passions, ignorant and superstitious, despotic, proud, and revengeful, but lavishly generous to his followers and dependents, lofty and implacable to his enemies, ferociously fervid in favour of his friends, heedless of the right or wrong in their cause, embodied many of the characteristics, good and evil, of the great feudal noble of the fifteenth century. The archbishop was a prelate much more skilled in the lance than in the breviary, and being dispossessed of the revenues of his bishopric with his kinsfolk, the Medici, spent the greater part of his life in active and persevering labours to restore them in Florence ; and being endowed with a very sanguine, restless, and courageous disposition, was not one of the least formidable of the enemies of the republic.

The sons of the Duke of Gravina, on the other hand, represented the passing and the approaching era. The Lord Paolo, fraught with the same violent passions, but governing them by a finer reason, and modified in manners by the refined tastes which began to prevail ; his brother, the cardinal, learned, polished, ambitious, and intriguing, represented the new generation, while the young Fabio, studious, melancholy, and gentle, somewhat shadowed forth that weaker but more elegant and calm age which was to succeed. Traces of the approaching changes appeared even in the military household of the Duke of Gravina ; artists and scholars of various pretensions mingled with the brawling soldiery who crowded it ; and discussions of philosophy and Arcadian contentions in verse made themselves heard amidst the din of arms. Brutal mercenaries, refined poets, gorgeous painters, plotting exiles, intriguing ecclesiastics, composed groups in which might be discerned a fair epitome of the times.

The opinions which Bembo entertained on the subject of the projected alliance between his prince and the daughter of the Borgias, which had been much deepened by the sight of her surpassing beauty, were not likely to meet with any check in the society with which he now mingled. The Orsini and their guests were alike absorbed in the hopes and fears which the alliance prompted. Ambition in the Duke of Gravina, and desire to secure his house from the destruction menaced by the Borgias, made the thought ever uppermost in his mind. The confederate barons regarded it as the only durable cement of the new peace and of their own power ; and the alliance was especially dear on that account to the Duke of Urbino, whose love of learned leisure and of the arts, personal infirmities, and great possessions, rendered him the most unwilling to engage in broils, and the most likely to be assailed by them.

The canon was somewhat surprised at Sir Reginald's demeanour on learning the resolution of his illustrious brother-in-arms. It seemed that he admired his unshaken determination against the projected alliance ; but in speaking of it, he so marvelled at Alfonso's ability to refuse such happiness, and launched into praises so passionate of Lucrezia's beauty, that Bembo laughingly bade him remember that love in Italy was not of the slow growth of the north. The knight's martial visage suffused like that of a young maiden, and Bembo thought more of his own words than at first he had. But the light shade of suspicion vanished, when he observed the warmth of the friendship which the frank and undissembling northman had contracted with Paolo Orsino.

Two or three days intervened before the opening of the jubilee, and meanwhile the Hospitaller began to imagine that in coming to Rome for evidence against Lucrezia, he was likely to find his labour in vain. Vague rumours, indeed, he encountered similar to those which had already prejudiced him so strongly against her; but very strangely all this darkness which surrounded Lucrezia seemed only to give a contrast which heightened the splendour of her brilliant qualities, and the interest which her beauty and talents universally created. The Roman populace, with a species of that enthusiasm for all that is illustrious, which they have preserved among the few relics of their glory, idolized her for the mere perfection of her person; and, moreover, believed that to her they owed the paternal mildness of the rule, with which Alexander had replaced the ruthless tyranny of the barons. It seemed impossible to discover any tangible proof, or even clue to one; all that was certainly known was in Lucrezia's favour.

The Knight of St. John did not often see Sir Reginald during this interval, partly at his own desire, and partly because the latter was deeply engaged in warlike exercises with the Lord Paolo, who earnestly desired to shine before his mistress in a tournament, which was to be given among the other rejoicings of the festival. The knights of England and of France surpassed those of all other countries in the science of these military pastimes, and Le Beaufort, as might be expected in one of such strength and agility, trained to arms, and delighting in little else from his childhood, was of amazing dexterity in all exercise of the body. Alfonso had also been his pupil, and owed much of his skill to the young tramontane's instructions. But Messer Beimbo presented himself as frequently as the prince would permit, and always with some new insinuations in favour of Lucrezia. Among the rest he had discovered that she was a poetess, and in the little poems which Pier de' Medici and others of the guests in the Orsini palace ascribed to her, there breathed a strange mixture of voluptuousness and melancholy, tenderness and gaiety, that but for the general shadow which was indefinitely visible over all, the Hospitaller would have thought it impossible that so dark a spirit could give utterance to phantoms so radiantly coloured, and dancing in pleasurable light.

Apprehending that among the multitude of strangers whom he might expect to encounter, some one would recognise him, Alfonso rigidly adhered to his monkish costume, the hood of which enabled him to conceal his countenance without exciting attention. The austerity of his general conduct authorised this strictness in observing the rules of his order, which, in that age of dissolution and license might else have challenged suspicion. And thus he spent his time, restlessly wandering about the great city and its ruins, striving in vain, although a scholar, and fraught with the grand historical recollections which haunt all its circuit, to take an interest in what he beheld, and rather distracted than amused with the Babel-like confusion of nations, languages, and costumes which surrounded him.

The days immediately preceding the opening of the jubilee were devoted by the pilgrims to solemn and penitential devotion, confession, and the fulfilment of various vows. The stairs of St. Peter were continually crowded with devotees, who spent whole days in ascending them on their knees, uttering a certain number of prayers on each step, persons of the highest rank, and especially women, being of the number. But it raised strange thoughts on the depravity of the times, to witness how con-

tinually the confessional of the grand Penitentiary was entered by masked personages, though professedly instituted for the audience of crimes of a magnitude beyond all the extensive powers of absolution confided to the clergy in general. On this subject Alfouno took a new and extraordinary interest when he heard that the office was exercised by the Dominican confessor of Donna Lucrezia. He conceived a project which was in keeping with the characteristics of the Italian mind, but which was probably not uninfluenced by the superstitious feeling to which the associations of his whole life had subjected even the powerful intellect of the Prince of Ferrara.

The thought occurred to him that he would seek the presence of the Penitentiary, and confess the horrors which filled his mind under pretence of learning whether such suspicions against the pontiff, although involuntary, were an offence against the church. The look or even gestures of the confessor of Lucrezia might throw more light than any words he was likely to reply. Accordingly, enveloped in his mantle and hood, the Knight of St. John went to St. Peter's, in which the Penitentiary held his dark sessions. It was the eve of the jubilee, and at the hour of vespers. The area of the basilica was filled with a vast and silent crowd, absorbed in their devotions, and the only light was bestowed by the evening sun duskily illuminating the emblazoned windows, or the glimmer of distant shrines hung with black, and attended each by its group of ministering priests.

The Penitentiary's station was in the subterraneous chapel, in which is the tomb of St. Peter—the very loadstone of devotion throughout the Christian world. Standing among a number of penitents in a dark vault before the shrine, the scene within was only occasionally visible to Alfouno, when the bronze gate opened for the exit or entrance of some of those heavily laden sinners. The tomb was stripped of its costly ornaments, and lighted only by the torches of some monks, each of a different nation, whose office it was to interpret to the Penitentiary whenever occasion arose. These torches gave the dusk and mournful light suiting the place of sepulchre of martyred saints. On the tomb itself stood an urn of black marble, beneath which was an alabaster tablet, on which were engraven the bull declaring the jubilee, and the conditions of penance and prayer to enable the faithful to obtain its benefits. The devotion and infinite variety of the pilgrims was evinced by the great heap of coins of the mintage of almost all the European nations, and of all metals, from gold to lead, which were piled before the shrine. Immediately below this treasury, in a coarse wooden chair, sat the Penitentiary—his hands clasped rigidly together, and his usually stern and pale visage overspread with a darker haze of its habitual gloom.

While Alfouno was anxiously awaiting his turn to be admitted to the presence of the Penitentiary, the gates of the confessional suddenly opened, and a female form glided out. She was closely veiled, and in his absorption of mind, Alfouno might scarcely have noticed her, but for the singular intensity of the gaze with which the Dominican followed her retreating figure. Glancing at the lady, a vague suspicion crossed Alfouno's mind that she was not altogether unknown to him. It seemed, too, that the lady paused, as if involuntarily, and with a gesture of surprise, but almost simultaneously she quickened her step, and hastened out.

To verify this doubt, however, became a matter of such eager curiosity

to the Knight of St. John, that he abandoned his first project, and followed the fair confessionist in her hurried exit. Keeping at some distance in the rear to prevent suspicion, he watched the lady down the aisles into a side chapel, and concluding that she had entered to perform some devotional exercise, he determined to await her return at the portal. A considerable time elapsed when, growing impatient, he entered the chapel. He found it hung with black, with an altar in the centre dimly illuminated, near which was the tomb of a former pontiff of the Borgian name, Calixtus III. Some priests were engaged in chaunting a funeral mass at the altar; and the veiled lady was kneeling before it, apparently absorbed in devotion, or in some stronger feeling, for Alfonso heard her sob when she attempted to articulate in the responses to the solemn and pathetic litany which the Catholic church consecrates to the dead. But Alfonso's observation was immediately checked. A verger came forward upon those soundless shoes which all vergers seem to have, and mildly informed him that the lady, Donna Lucrezia, had commanded that no one should be admitted during the performance of the mass for the repose of the soul of her murdered brother, the Duke of Gandia.

"Ay, she is afraid that men will note the strange excess of her grief—she whose offences are, even in her own opinion, of a dye to call for the cleansing hand of the Penitentiary himself!" mused Alfonso bitterly, as he retired; and persuading himself that he was much pleased with this shadow of confirmation, he returned with a somewhat laggard step to his projected interview with the Dominican. But as he arrived in the church, which was now nearly in darkness, he heard a distant chaunt, and saw a procession approaching down the centre aisle; and by the torches which they carried he distinguished a number of Dominicans, with the banner of the Inquisition borne among them, a red cross in a black field, bearing the motto—

"In hoc signo vinces."

Among them, and seemingly as the principal personage, came Fra Bruno. The gloom and austere melancholy of his countenance was strongly contrasted by the round and jovial features of the monk, who, according to the custom of religious orders, was the Dominican's special companion. If a hero is seldom one to his valet-de-chambre, familiarity seemed in nowise to have diminished the reverence of the theologian's attendant, who followed him with the respectful admiration and awe due to a superior being.

To the increased disappointment of the Knight of St. John, the procession was joined as it advanced by a number of noblemen and dignitaries civil and religious, among whom were the three conservatori, as the principal magistrates of Rome, under the Senator, were styled. A guard of pikemen belonging to these magistrates, waited at the entrance of the basilica, who surrounded the procession when it arrived, and escorted it through the crowd in the square below towards the bridge of Santangelo, attended by a great multitude. The observations of the bystanders soon explained the meaning of this scene to the Hospitaller.

"I'll to the Ghetto, and hear him preach to the infidel dogs of Jews!" exclaimed one.

"They say he will preach in Hebrew, for he has the gift of the tongues like the Apostles!" said another.

"I marvel the holy father thinks it worth his while to trouble about the souls of Jews!" said an old beggar.

“ He is sufficient to convert the fiends in hell!—O, my brethren, what an honour it is that our order should have produced such a saint on earth!” said a Dominican among the crowd.

“ In troth, it is said ‘ye lead him the life of one!’” said the deformed tailor, who happened to be at hand. “ Yet some report it is not by the good will of his brethren that he was not long ago translated above!”

The laugh at this sarcastic allusion to the jealousies by no means unusual among those who ought least to entertain them, had scarcely subsided, ere a rough voice yelled out—“ What avails preaching to the murderers of our Lord? For my part, I would set the whole Jewry in a blaze, and burn them root and branch in it!”

“ It is always usual to preach to them on the great vigils of the church, and what is greater than the Jubilee?—besides, they pay notable fines for exemptions,” said an officer of the Datary’s chamber.

“ I fear ‘tis a composition with Antichrist!” returned a personage who from his garb might be a familiar of the Inquisition.

He who had proposed the root and branch measure turned with eager approval to the functionary, but on observing his costume, immediately dived into the crowd like a fish into the water. The Hospitaller had scarcely time to take a glance at this violent specimen of Christian zeal; but in that brief view he was much struck with his appearance. He was a man past the middle age, with the sallow complexion of a peasant of the Marshes, to which his costume answered. His broad hat, garnished with many-coloured ribands, was drawn over his visage, but not sufficiently to conceal the ghastly scars with which it was disfigured. His lurking suspicious eye, and the peculiar manner with which, from habit, he carried his short cloak drawn over his breast, as if to conceal the naked stiletto, convinced the knight that, whatever he might assume to be, he was one of those blackest of the scourges of Italy which the license of the times had rendered fearfully numerous—the banditti and bravoes.

Scarcely bestowing more than a thought on so usual an evidence of social disorder, the Hospitaller passed on without noticing that he himself had attracted at least equal attention from the worthy described. Being now aware of the direction in which he was certain to find the Dominican, Alfonso determined not to follow his train through the quarter which led to the Ghetto, to which indeed the multitude offered serious obstacles, only allowing room for the monk’s retinue in reverence to him, and by painfully compressing one another; but to hire a boat which would probably convey him to the scene of action as speedily as those who went by land through so many obstructions, though the river wound considerably. He took his way down a narrow lane which descended to the Tiber in a precipitous slope, and gave the usual whistle. Only one little boat appeared, whose owner seemed to be asleep in despair of custom, for it was not until the whistle was repeated more shrilly that he set his oars in motion, and came slowly over the water.

It was one of those barques common on the Tiber, used in transporting fruit and vegetables and other light merchandize. It was built on a pattern probably in use in the days of the first Tarquin. A slender bowsprit of some supple wood, nearly double the length of the boat, lay across a little mast, with its canvass ready to be spread for shelter against the sun, or to catch any favouring breeze. The prow was high and curved, and ornamented with rude carvings, the rudder broad, and the oars of classical squatness and breadth. The old man himself who rowed it seemed dried

and hardened by exposure and toil into a kind of wood, but that the expression of discontent and gloom in his visage belonged but too much to flesh.

The knight stepped into this barque without exchanging a word with his equally laconic Charon, until having taken his place at the rudder, he said "To the Ghetto!" The boatman immediately splashed in his oars, and they were fairly out in the stream ere the knight observed that there was a third passenger—and no other than the assumed peasant of the Marshes.

"What dost thou here, fellow?—The boat is mine for the nonce," said the Hospitaller, not without a start of unpleasant surprise.

The peasant replied in a rude and broken dialect, that he besought his reverend lordship's pardon, but as a Christian anxious to hear the confutation of the Jews out of their own books, he implored to be allowed to accompany him.

The knight mused for an instant; but considering the determined manner of the ruffian, which gave the humility of his phrase a tinge of mockery, the doubtful nature of his own suspicions, and of the boatman's appearance, he desisted from his first intention, which was to throw his follower overboard.

"But thou shalt not have thy passage for thanks," he said, hitting upon an ingenious plan to obviate any sudden danger from the lurking right hand. "Take a pair of oars, and help the old man on, or I tell thee plainly, good brother pilgrim, one of us two must leave the wood for the water."

A slight shuffling of the hand in the cloak seemed to indicate that the Hospitaller's suspicions were not without foundation. At all events, the movement of sheathing a weapon would have produced a similar sound. But the man obeyed without apparent hesitation, and thus reinforced, the boat shot rapidly down the stream.

The knight's observation never in reality wandered from the persons of his rowers, but he affected to survey the shores on each side with the curiosity of a stranger. On one was the thronged and thickly built piles of the ancient city, on the other the Janiculan Hill with its solitary palaces and immense gardens. The moon shining in a sky of silvery blue, speckled with little purple clouds, revealed the distant magnificence of the Vatican, and suffered the gaze to expand even to the remote swell of the Apennines.

By degrees the shores widened into the elbow-like bend of the Tiber below the Capitoline, and the Island of St. Bartholomew appeared. Beyond that, the river takes another deep curve, bathing the base of the mountain of ruins—the Aventine. Even from that distance, colossal relics of ancient grandeur—shattered walls—naked porticoes—wildernesses of broken arches and solitary columns—could be discerned amidst the woods and wild vegetation, which had arisen as if to re-assert their ancient possession of the deserted site. The impressed oarsman did little to excite farther suspicion, and both he and the old boatman plied their task manfully—until suddenly, as if by consent, they dropped their oars, and both began to mutter a *Pater Noster*. In spite of this pious exordium, the knight's suspicions would have vented themselves in some positive form, if he had not observed that the boatman and the peasant both stopped short, and looked at each other with surprise.

"Hast thou a vow to St. Bartlemy too, brother?" said the boatman,

speaking nearly for the first time since he had received his passengers on board.

“Nay, brother, but hereabouts they say is the great mouth of the city sinks, down which so many dead Christians hourly float, that I thought it a good deed to pray for the soul of any that may now be coming,” replied the disguised bravo, as he more than ever seemed to D. in Alfonso.

“And hereabouts began my ill luck, for ever since I saw the Duke of Gondia’s body (poor gentleman!) thrown into the river yonder, I have been shunned like the pestilence, by all but strangers whom St. Bartlemy occasionally sends to keep me from starvation,” said the boatman, dismally. “No Roman will be seen in my boat, lest the murderers should believe that I am giving inklings as to their persons and qualities, when heaven knows, if I can guess at either!”

“Art thou sure of that, old man?—His holiness would not tell the gold with which he would repay such intelligence as might guide his vengeance?” returned the peasant of the Marshes, in a pure Roman dialect, and he drew himself with a sudden slide towards the old man, gazing at him eagerly, and putting his hand again in his cloak. But ere any effect could follow this gesture, the Knight of St. John sprang forward, and with a sudden exertion of his great strength, fairly heaved the peasant overboard!

“My lord! would you murder the man?” exclaimed the boatman, staring aghast.

“If he be a peasant of the Marshes, they are all as good for water as land,—if not, he is some assassin, who is as well below, to keep company perchance with some of his sending there!” replied the Hospitaller. “What is this he hath left behind him?—Is this stiletto thine, old man?”

“Oh, blessed Bartlemy, no!” exclaimed the boatman, raising the weapon as cautiously as if he were picking up a serpent. “But, as I think, I have seen just such a one hanging at the belt of John of the Catacombs, ere he and his bravoes were banished by the good Cardinal of Sienna!”

“Would, then, I had an arquebuss or bow, for yonder is his head dotting up in the water—now under again, like a water duck’s—as if he feared a bolt!” said the knight. “He is making for the reeds in the island; but so much the better do I think of thee for his mislike, that I will myself tug at the oar—so have with you!”

“Ah, my lord, I was not once so gloomy a man as to make people misdoubt me, but as full of my songs and cheer as another,” returned the boatman. “But every thing has gone wrong with me since that night—that night!—and all for being so tired, that I forgot to say my devotion to the Saint of the Ship!”

By the latter name, the unlucky boatman designated the island of the Tiber, which in those days, still preserved a resemblance to the form in which the fantastic magnificence of the republic had thrown it.

“But how chanced it?—Tell me the story, for it hath been variously bruited in the northern countries of Italy, whence thy Roman ear has long since advised thee I come?” said the knight, with an anxiety which he carefully suppressed in his tones.

“Why, you must know, signor, it was some such night as this, only it was on a Wednesday, but I speak now of the weather,” said the old man, his suppressed sorrows suddenly bursting into garrulity. “I had unloaded my wood on the shore yonder, near the Jewish quarter, and was

resting myself in the serene of the night, in my boat, as well as I could, for the watch I was bound to keep, that nobody else should load himself with what I had unloaded; and, by the whitening of the stars, it might have been about midnight, when I saw—(would to all the saints I had been asleep, as many a time that night a good angel strove to lull me, with the calmest sounds that ever I heard of wind and water!) when I saw, coming out of the lane, to the left of the church of San Girolamo (ora pro me!), two men on the open square—on foot—who, by their skulking manner, and going backward and forward, showed that they were only there to find out if there was anybody else."

"Have you no recollection of their persons?" interrupted the knight, eagerly.

"By our Lady!—but one was very like yon rogue, whom I hope your lordship has sunk!" said the old man, pleased with the interest his tale excited. "The other, by his voice and stiff gait, might be a Spaniard,—but they both wore black masks. Having explored in every direction, and seeing not a living soul, (for your lordship may believe, I dared scarcely move under the sail with which I had covered me against the dew,) they returned up the same lane. Shortly after, two others came out, who used a like diligence, and finding nothing new, gave a signal, which seemed to summon their companions; for out of the lane came, first, a man upon a dapple grey horse, who carried on the crupper the body of a dead man, the head and arms hanging on one side, and the feet on the other; and the two men who had come in the first place to see how the land lay, propped it on each side, lest it should hustle off.

"These three came forward to the river (the other two remaining to guard the street); and just above the arches of the sewers, he who was on horseback turned the crupper to the water, and the two who were on each side of him seized the dead carcass, one by the arms, the other by the legs, and after swinging it backward and forward once or twice, for the better purchase, they tossed it headlong into the water. Then he who was on horseback inquired of them, whether 'it was thrown?' without turning his head, as if to shun the horror of the sight; but when they replied, 'signor, yes;' he whirled the horse round, and turned his face to the river."

"And his face!—Dost thou not remember it?—Some dim view thou must needs have caught of it?" said the knight, so breathlessly agitated that the old man paused and seemed affrighted.

"I have already told your excellency, and so may Saint Bartlemy send me bread or not, I dared not look at it, lest the horseman's eye, which blazed like a coal, should meet mine—for there is a strange something in eyes, signor, that men always feel when they are looked at! But seeing the dead man's mantle float on the waters, he asked, what black thing that was, swimming? Whereupon one answered—one answered—"

"And what?" exclaimed the impatient Hospitaller.

"Heaven forgive me if it comes not often into my memory, that he said 'Eminence,—the mantle!'—But, no, it must have been Excellence,—'Excellence, the mantle!' Ay, it was Excellence!" said the old man confusedly. "Whereupon one of them threw a heap of heavy stones upon it, which made it sink to the bottom; and when there was no longer a bubble to be seen, they were all turning away when a girl came shrieking down the narrow lane with two old women after her. But what she had to do in the matter I know not, only that the rider galloped up to her, and

seized her by the hair, and held her until the old women came up. Then she swooned, and the women carried her off, while the men turned up the other lane, which leads to San Giacomo. This is all that I saw and know about the matter, as I told the sanctity of our holy father himself; and why I should be shunned like the fiend of the plague himself—”

“ But the girl—the girl!—what sort of a girl was she?—what height—complexion—shape? ” exclaimed the Hospitaller, letting his oar drop in the absorption of his anxiety.

“ How know I?—She was a girl like another girl—she wore petticoats,” replied the old man, gruffly. “ Why do you tease me with such strange questions?—A girl! is not one girl as like another as two poppies? ”

“ Noted you not even the colour of her hair, good father?—I am not asking you questions to amuse myself, but with an intent to make it worth your trouble replying,” said the knight, with forced calmness. “ Was not her hair of a bright golden colour, for indeed that is much given to mischief? ”

“ Signor, I caught but a glance at her like an owl’s at the moon ; but now you speak of hair, I think I noticed on hers a string of coins on a red ribbon, such as the foolish Jew girls of the Ghetto wear for ornament,—or else it was blood, and they had hurt her too,—for the moon shone so brightly I could but see it.”

“ And yet you noted not the colour of the hair—although the horseman seized her by it too? ” exclaimed the Hospitaller, impatiently.

“ All cats are grey by night, and yet methinks it must have been black, for he twisted his hand in it, and the hand looked very white against it, ” replied the old man musingly. “ And yet I know no more than the waves I strike whether it were not green or blue!—I have known hills that were pink at a distance turn black at hand.”

“ But wherefore hastened you not to communicate to the governor of the city what you had seen, so quickly as to give a clue to the murderers, for I have heard the body was not found till Friday? ” said the knight.

“ The saints reward you! since I have earned my living on Tiber, ” returned the boatman with a grim smile. “ I have seen dead bodies thrown in, in like manner, at least a hundred times, and never heard a word said about it, nor any imaginable trouble taken in the matter. So thinking that this would pass like the rest, I minded my own business, and let other folks’ alone, until, like a fool as I was, hearing the greatness of him who was lost, I thought I should make a good day’s work by carrying the news, as if I might not have remembered the saying, ‘ Ill-come was never Welcome! ’ and so ruined myself for five crowns, which was what the duke gave me,—the cardinal that was then, and said it was too much for a drunkard’s dream! Could I indeed have given them any clue to the murderers I might have made my fortune, for his holiness and Lady Lucrezia were sheer mad with grief; but I had too much conscience to accuse the innocent!—Tis hard indeed that conscience should cheat a man of his daily bread!—And yet ’twas as well as it happened, praised be Saint Bartlemy! for perhaps if they had thought I could have betrayed them, they would have cut my throat before I could get the words well out, for who knows who was in the secret? But yonder is the Ghetto, and I trust your excellency will remember I have but so many passengers as my blessed saint sends me in defiance of my evil fortune.”

“ And in addition to good pay, I will give thee a counsel, old father, ” said the Hospitaller, with a heavy sigh. “ Do not tell your story before

too many of your passengers, even strangers, lest you should not always have such honest listeners!—Nay, perchance you may meet with some who, like yon courteous attendant of mine whom we left in the waters—may have their reasons to stop your tongue at your throat.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE JEWS OF ROME.

“ But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances,
Which lead directly to the door of truth,
Will give you satisfaction, you may have it.”—SHAKESPERE.

In Rome, as in most of the Christian cities of Europe, the Jews had (and have still in Rome!) a peculiar district appropriated to them, out of which they were not permitted to dwell. In London it was the Jewry—in Rome, the Ghetto—styled more loftily in the pontifical edicts, *Hebreorum Contubernium*. This Contubernium was a district of considerable extent raised originally amidst the swamps of the Tiber, at the foot of the Capitoline, surrounded either by lofty walls or houses, which were not permitted to have even a loophole to the exterior. Five massive gates, guarded by the halberdiers of the Roman magistracy, were opened at sunrise and closed at sunset, to emit and receive back the descendants of Abraham, bees laden with a spoil sweeter to them than honey—that of the persecuting but outwitted, the insolent but cheated Christian.

Objects of unutterable contempt and hatred with the populace, in whose hearts the Catholic Church of the middle ages had infused a veneration and love for the person of the Redeemer, rather than of his attributes, approaching to a passion, and whose devotion was as yet unalloyed by the scepticism and indifference which began to pervade the higher classes of society—the regulations of the Ghetto were perhaps as beneficial to the Jews as they appeared to be severe and restrictive. Within its walls, at least, they were safe from any sudden outbreak of the fury which smouldered in the hearts of the people against the descendants of the destroyers of the Saviour; they might observe their customs and religious rites unmolested and unquestioned; and hoard the treasures which their patient industry, skill in many arts, and above all usuries, accumulated.

In the Ghetto accordingly the Jews of Rome dwelt as a nation apart—separated almost equally by their own abhorrence of the Nazarenes, and the spirit of their laws, as by the loathing of their oppressors. Many of the Jewish women were said to have never been outside the walls of the Ghetto, and to be as ignorant of the system of policy surrounding them as if the tribes still pitched their tents in the wilderness. The Hebrews themselves, with the jealousy of orientals and that inspired by their rigid law, cherished this vague ignorance in their women, while with matchless patience and pliancy they adapted their combinations to every change in the shifting panorama of the world without.

Spread all over the earth, but preserving the fellowship of kindred wrongs and hopes, the Jews enabled one another to forestal and engross some of the most valuable trades which were exercised in the rude state

of society. Above all, as usurers and dealers in precious stones, they had acquired riches which the popular envy and greed exaggerated even into the possession of magic skill in the transmutation of metals. The natural tendency of the Hebrew mind to abstruse and cabalistical lore, their intercourse with the Arabians and other eastern nations, had indeed frequently thrown some of their most subtle intellects into pursuits still darker and more fallacious. All these vague causes of hatred and fear in the minds of the people were increased by the reports in circulation relating to the mysterious customs and ceremonies of the Jewish religion. Hideous tales were repeated, and found a ready credence among the populace, against them. The immoveable constancy with which they adhered to their law, the bitter animosity with which they regarded the few proselytes gained over by the Christian church, furnished the groundwork of many of those dark legends prevalent against them; such as that they offered human sacrifices at their high festivals, generally of Christian children beguiled into their power, or of apostates from the law; the latter supposition not altogether unsupported by the fanatic hatred with which they pursued such offenders.

Thus separated from the Christian masses, or rather imprisoned, the Jews of the Ghetto preserved the characteristics of a foreign and eastern people. Notwithstanding the belief of their immense riches, or perhaps to baffle its dangerous effects, whenever the Ghetto was opened for the inspection of Christians, it presented one aspect of haggard and dilapidated poverty. This happened generally about three or four times a year, when a grand attempt at conversion was made, the pope appointing the most esteemed preachers to deliver sermons, at which the Jews were compelled to be present. All the rest of the year they were subject to unremitting fines and penalties, under which they still contrived to flourish like chickweed beneath a stone. To gratify the hatred of the people, the most degrading submissions and dues were exacted from them—among the rest the annual ceremony of presenting the book of their law with an entreaty to be allowed to stay another year in Rome, either to the pontiff or the magistracy, on which it was usual to let the book fall, and to deliver the gracious reply that the pontiff permitted, but did not confirm. A foot-race of Hebrews was also a pastime which the populace were never denied in carnival time.

On the occasion to which the above dissertation is a necessary prolixity, the Jews had good reason to expect a more than usually devote throng in the train of the announcee of the Jubilee. They had prepared accordingly. On entering the gate of the Ghetto, the Hospitaller was struck with the melancholy aspect of the houses and the emptiness of the little shops, which seemed like holes in the walls. The precious wares, the silks, the stuffs, the gold, the gems, if any such the Hebrews of the Ghetto possessed, were as carefully concealed as those they abstracted from the Egyptians on their departure into Canaan. The exceeding narrowness of the streets, which were sometimes scarcely wide enough to allow two persons to go abreast, and were generally in a manner arched by the bending over of the storys above, increased the disagreeable effect. Noisome smells greeted the nostrils at every turn, and the flutter of rags from numerous dark lattices seemed to announce the poverty within.

Not a Jew was to be seen, much less a Jewess, throughout the whole line of march to the large open space where they held their market, and where they were decreed to assemble in mass. The Christians rushed

uninterruptedly on, laughing, shouting, yelling, and crushing against one another, as if they were taking possession by storm. The long, narrow, and unknown windings confused and misled many, but the Hospitaller, happening to take a by-way which led directly to the scene of action, entered the market-place among the multitude which had kept pace with the Dominican and his attendants.

An open square of great extent appeared, unevenly surrounded with piles of dwellings, equally ruinous and disconsolate with those of the narrow streets behind. Most of these alleys radiated from all points into this space, and gave its disordered architecture the appearance of being split and rent into chasms. Some of the houses seemed to be doubtfully propped with timber; but on the summits of nearly all these tottering fabrics, the curious eye of the Hospitaller remarked, by the light of the tolerant planet which did not disdain to shed its beams as benignantly as on the domes of the Vatican, innumerable flower-pots and outlines of terraces, evincing no small skill in the oriental art of making skyey gardens on the roofs.

The piazza was paved with volcanic tufa, very unevenly laid, and in the centre was a great fountain of granite, without the least ornament, intended exclusively for use. Around this were arranged stone benches, with tables of similarly rude material, at which usually sat the council of the elders, who decided in all disputes, regulated the market, and governed this inner empire, partly by the maxims of common sense and justice, and partly by the laws prescribed in their saered books; severe indeed—and severely executed—without provoking a thought of appeal to the milder and often opposing Christian judicature.

But now this Sinhedrim was installed in its place of honour for a far different purpose, to hear with inward abhorrence and outward respect that law reviled, and its complete overthrow denounced. To this intent a moveable pulpit, which resembled a bronze cauldron on a tripod, carried by four Jewish converts, was duly planted under the supreme direction of the Dominican's companion friar. The preacher himself knelt in fervent but silent prayer, surrounded by his noble guard, most of whom were deeply in debt to the listeners, smiling with hatred and contempt, and leaning on their naked swords. Beyond the seats of the elders were assembled the great mass of those who were to profit by the exhortation, distinguished by their long beards, glittering eyes, and peculiar physiognomies, but the whole male population of the Ghetto—for not a single female was to be seen—could not certainly have been there; and in fact the Jews elected from among themselves, by lot, a certain number to make up a show, to listen to Christian verities, and to endure the insults and violence of the Christian visitors.

Beyond the circle of these compelled neophytes, a tumultuous mob struggled for the possession of every point whence a view of the proceedings could be obtained, quarrelling and fighting with one another, buffeting and pressing against the unresisting Jews, who knew that their policy was not to give the least pretence for the general massacre and plunder which on these occasions hovered over them by a finer thread than that to which hung the sword of Damocles. They submitted without expostulation to the rude swaying of the mob; to their blows and revilings opposing only an endurance which could not be exhausted. But the horror, anxiety, and rage which glowed in their bosoms were strongly reflected in their visages as seen by the smoky glare of innumerable

torches which they were compelled to exhibit at all the windows of their houses. Engaged in this office only did some women appear—for the most part withered and old—or veiled with more than Turkish scrupulosity.

A remarkable exception to this seeming rule struck Alfonso, when having ensconced himself out of observation up a dark doorway which belonged to a house falling in ruins and uninhabited, he had leisure to survey the whole pandemonium. Not far to his left projected an irregular pile of woodwork, built not without some pretensions to architecture, with quaint carvings and devices of beasts and birds on the joists and window-frames, but all toppling down in extreme neglect and decay. About mid height jutted a penthouse with a narrow balcony, supported like many of the other buildings by props of timber set against it from the ground. The lower part of the house was closed and barred, but from the mortar hanging over the door with a pestle chained to it, the knight concluded that it was the residence of some apothecary or other professor of the healing art.

In the balcony of this tumbling tenement was the object which attracted the Hospitaller's attention, always, in spite of his severe principles, alive to the perception of female beauty; yet it was not this quality alone which fixed his notice, although the face and form might have been taken for a perfect model of oriental beauty, but for the pallid hue which sickled the golden cast of the complexion, the drooping and meagre lines of the figure, else so finely moulded. The Jewess was attired in a dusty and disordered garb, which yet was originally of fine silks, but so curiously pranked out and bedizened with ribands, shreds of different colours, and what seemed to be gems of the purest water, that the knight at first imagined she was some unhappy creature put forth to attract licentious observation. Her countenance, young, wasted, and pallid, strengthened the impression, but a farther consideration at last staggered it. Shading the torch with her hand, its light struck powerfully on her face; and in the wild, vacant depth of the eyes, the unmeaning smile with which she watched the rolling of the human sea below, the fantastic richness of her garniture, exceeding in glare and contrast every vagary even of a Jewish toilet, Alfonso imagined that he recognised characteristics of insanity. But perhaps it was one of these ornaments—a chain of coins twisted in the black disordered hair—which chiefly attracted the Hospitaller's continued observation. And yet he could not remember for some time why he noticed it at all.

Meanwhile the preparations for the Dominican's harangue went on. The pulpit was duly hoisted, and as the friar had now concluded his prayer, two rabbins advanced to present him with a copy of the Old Testament used in the synagogue, for from their own law were they to be confuted. They offered it with a deep oriental bend, and a humble request that the messenger of his holiness, their sovereign, would be pleased to deliver his message. The Dominican replied briefly and sternly that it was not the message of any earthly power which he was there to deliver, and then mounted the pulpit by a ladder, which his humble brother held for him with infinite reverence. The attendant friar then sprinkled a lustration all around the pulpit with a bunch of hyssop, which he dipped in an urn of holy water, liberally showering on the elders, while they gnawed their under lips in silent wrath and contempt.

Interested as the Hospitaller felt himself in the singular appearance of the Jewish girl, it was with no satisfaction that he found his curiosity

shared by a personage who took his post immediately before the doorway in which the knight had ensconced himself out of observation. He wore a large hat, slouched over his face, with a twist of cockleshells round it, the grey mantle and staff of a pilgrim of Compostella, so that little of his features was visible, save his very brilliant eyes. These he kept fixed so long and earnestly on the Hebrew girl in her balcony, that Alfonso's uneasiness was certainly not unjustified, since he began to take an interest in her welfare, and the eyes were filled with something of mingled gloom and scrutiny.

"Ay, it is she—but how changed!" muttered the gazer half aloud. "Where is this rogue?—he keeps us waiting long."

This the Hospitaller now perceived was addressed to a man who stood at some little distance, who, by his coarse armour and accoutrements, especially the morion unhonoured by any cognizance, was probably a rider, in one of the numerous free companies.

"Yea, my lord, it is mad Miriam!" returned the rider, in an under tone.

"The wench who they say had a Christian lover roasted alive by the Jews?" said the pilgrim, ironically. "It is indeed—physician, cure thyself!—since the skilful hags, her grandames, cannot restore the blood to that corpse-like cheek, nor take the wild-fire out of her eyes. But surely this boasted steel-hearted knave of thine means to play us false?"

"Were it against the fiend, I would warrant him; but folks have a great reverence for this holy man, that goes to visit a plague-patient more cheerful than another his dame," replied the rider. "But if it is necessary he should die, methinks it might be much more wisely adventured in the lonely places he haunts, than here in the midst of thousands."

"Here only can a tumult be raised without much danger, and easily limited. I do not set forests on fire to make me warm," replied the pilgrim. "Here they will lay the mischief on the Jews; elsewhere suspicion might—nay, must—be roused; for what bravo would deem it worth his while to slay a wretched monk?"

"Yonder he comes, and, by all my sins! streaming like a water-dog!—Waggle your staff, signor,—but he sees us," said the soldier, in whom and in his fellow interlocutor a vague suspicion entered the mind of the involuntary hearer that he beheld the Duke of Romagna, and his satellite, Migueloto. But he had scarcely time to devise any tangible meaning to the strange words he overheard, when a third person joined the pilgrim and his friend. It was not without some emotion that he recognised in the sullen, drenched ruffian who approached, his late unlucky companion, the peasant of the Marshes.

"Giovan, Giovan! how long thou hast kept me gaping for thee!" muttered the pilgrim, clutching the bravo's arm impatiently. "But how camest thou in this plight?"

At this moment the voice of the preacher was heard over all the murmuring and confused noises in the piazza, reading a Hebrew text, which he afterwards translated into Latin. It was the striking of the rock by Moses, when the waters gushed forth at Horeb. The mingling of those powerful tones hindered Alfonso from distinctly hearing the account which the bravo gave of his immersion. But towards the conclusion the pilgrim drew him farther back into the ruined gateway, and the Hospitaller heard him ejaculate between his clenched teeth—"Dog of a villain! dost thou dare to say that thou wilt fail me then? Hast thou forgotten who I am?"

"But, signor, methinks it was an angel sent to my prevention, in the armour of a Knight of the Sepulchre!" said the bravo, shuddering with fear and the cold of his wet clothing.

"Idiot! dost thou deem that an angel could have touched thee, and not blasted thee?" returned the pilgrim, impatiently. "But if Giorgio Schiavone babbles thus—it is well for the old fool that he pretends not to have seen faces but masks! But what hath this stranger—a Knight of St. John, thou sayest—to do to stir up the muddy waters? An angel!—by Heaven, I will make a devil of thee if thou dost hesitate! What more wouldst thou have? Name thine own reward."

"A pyramid of gold shall not bribe me to it, signor!" replied the bravo. "But I am a true man, and will keep no hire which I have not earned: so come, Don Miguel, when it pleases you, to the catacombs, and I will restore all that I have received of my lord's gold. But the saints protect that holy man—else wherefore should the armed figure deprive me of my stiletto, and leave me my life to repent in?"

"Holy man!—he!—honest Giovanni—holy!—ay, according to his country's proverb—*La cruz en los pechos, el diablo en los hechos!*" returned the pilgrim, with stifled vehemence. "Yes, yes!—the cross on the breast, the devil in the rest!—I tell thee, friend—was it a saint's part to stir a wife to mortal hatred of her husband,—to scorn, to loathe, to divorce him!—for it was he that stirred the fire in her soul against the Lord of Pesaro, and will prevent her from this so necessary marriage with the Orsino! Thou superstitious slave! canst thou not guess a reason for it? See we not all, that he watches over her like a dragon over a mine of diamonds?"

It may be imagined with what painful curiosity the Hôpitalier listened to this effusion, apparently of jealousy, although the lady's name, its object, had not once been pronounced; but he no longer doubted that the pilgrim was Cæsar Borgia.

"I know nothing of any dragons nor hidden treasures, my lord," said the bravo, with dogged stubbornness. "Albeit, I have paid many a bright ducat (which will never come back to me) to Mother Notte for divining rods, and such like trifleries. But may my soul never see Paradise, if I lift steel against that blessed man!"

"Fool, idiot, beast!" said the pilgrim, gnashing his teeth like a baffled tiger. "Why, when this traitorous monk's destruction will set the mob in such roaring mutiny as will give thy people (whom I see swarming about) a chance to commence a work which will enriched ye all for ever!"

"For ever!" repeated the bravo, somewhat hesitatingly. "But 'tis impossible! See you not how he is surrounded by naked swords! I thought he woul have come darkling through the narrow streets. Moreover, I have taken an oath—you heard it, signor?—at least, a man would not willingly damn himself."

"Thou sworest, Giovanni, not to lift steel against him!" said the pilgrim, eagerly. "But have I not seen thee bring down an eagle's flight soaring almost out of sight, with thine arquebuss? Where is it?—thou wert wont to carry it slung on thy shoulders."

"I sold it to the Leghorn rogues to take to England, where the gentlemen love such distant fowling. For my part I prefer to steal on my game with a club or a dagger," replied the bravo.

"Tut!—but wait; methinks I can yet provide thee with a weapon—I have marked for some time yonder man-at-arms keeps gaping at the

Jewess," said the pilgrim, emerging and signing to the bravo and Migueloto to retreat into the doorway. This movement brought the twain much nearer to Don Alfonso, but luckily without coming into contact with him, for valiant and powerful as was the Knight of St. John, it may be conjectured that he had no desire to expose himself to a conflict in the dark with three such opponents.

The person whom Cæsar indicated had indeed been for some time engaged in surveying the young Hebrew girl, and in vainly soliciting her attention with gestures and smiles. He was of middling height, but very stout and burly in frame, round of jaws and square of forehead, with a fierce and audacious expression of countenance, not unmixed with a kind of brutal good humour and joviality. His armour and accoutrements were those of a German trooper.

"By the mass, signor! I see your eyes are caught too," said the pilgrim, courteously saluting the man-at-arms. "Saw you ever a prettier piece of heathen flesh and blood?"

"And yet she looks more like a waxen image than a woman of the stuff you mention, sir pilgrim," returned the trooper, in an Italian which partook in no manner of a foreign accent.

"She is poisoned by the vapours of the drugs, and minerals, and alchemy amidst which she lives, and it were a charity to take her out of it," replied the pilgrim.

"I would the Ghetto were put to plunder, and take the Jewish gold who night, I would have yonder Jewish girl for my share," replied the trooper; adding in a melancholy tone, "but I am under severe penances now, by injunction of yonder bitter Penitentiary."

"Thou must have wrought some special deed to need his aid, brother," returned the pilgrim.

"But for wronging an old man of some few evil days of pains and aches," said the trooper, carelessly. "But since we are at questioning, what hast thou done to travel so far with the cockleshells?"

"I killed my brother, they say," replied the pilgrim, with equal coolness.

"Mine was but mine uncle!" said the trooper, eagerly, as if rejoicing in the comparative inferiority of his crime. " 'Tis true he had pampered me when a child, but who can wait for ever for an inheritance?"

"Av!—old men never die," returned the pilgrim, gloomily. "Thou art a bold fellow, doubtless, and a soldier too. I have been a good part of my time a silly priest, yet will I wager that I dare do what thou art now only daring to think."

"What am I thinking, I pray ye, then?" replied the trooper, with evident surprise.

"Thou art marking how conveniently those timbers are set to the balcony of the Jewess, for a man to climb up, and thinking that thou wouldst be glad if thou couldst summon the courage to scale it, and give her a kiss, to the scorn of this infidel mob," said the pilgrim.

"Yea, 'tis said they can better bear to have their beards spat on, than their women smiled on—and thou hast fairly guessed," replied the soldier, with increased surprise. "But for the fear of it!—I have clambered the wall of a strong city with my dagger's aid only, when boiling lead poured over among us like melting snow, and Vitellozzo himself kept his foot from the ladder."

"My staff against thine arquebuss, thou darest not attempt it, and I will succeed in it," returned the pilgrim.

“By our Lady!—but the Penitentiary bound me only to do offence to the pagans, and to use my arms against no man but by his command,” said the soldier.

“What man dost thou rave about, or what arms,—to snatch a kiss from a Jew girl’s brown cheek?” replied the pilgrim. “And are not the Jews pagan enough? Then, by Santiago, if thou wilt hold my staff, which is hollow and full of the gold of my expenses, I will do it before thine eyes, and for the very honour of the faith to put so bold a scorn upon these crucifiers!”

“Nay, but thou shalt not—at least till I have failed,” said the trooper, angrily. “Hold thou mine arquebuss and morion while I climb; but for I know that this town is full of rogues, if thou meanest me any deceit, learn better than to practise it, for I am not what I seem, but a great lord who will as soon crack a skull as an egg.”

The pilgrim replied apparently with some warmth, but as the preacher’s tones swelled suddenly high, only his latter words were audible, in which he declared that he would remain near the ruin, to restore the arquebuss, or rouse the populace to a rescue in case it became necessary. And with this compact, Alfonso marked that the trooper gave his weapon, helmet, and some heavy pieces of armour to the care of the pilgrim, and glided away as if to fulfil his insolent and violent project.

The pilgrim retired almost instantly, and rejoined his two accomplices, who were eagerly listening in their concealment of the doorway.

“Here, then, is thy weapon, Gian, if thou wouldest not rather have the lead in thine own skull!” he said, handing the piece to the bravo, who received it with manifest reluctance. “Moreover, I have made thee a pretty diversion—when the tumult which this villain will raise begins, what hast thou to do but to fire! And dost thou fear for thy person and soul when so black a wretch—for I know the thickskull to be Oliverotto da Fermo, that murdered his good old uncle by treachery—hazards both for a fool’s frolic? The monk is a fair mark!—do but look at him perched in his pulpit yonder with his arms spread out as if to open his breast to thy aim!”

“He looks like a black crueifixion!” muttered the bravo. “Some stray eyes will be sure to note the light of the burning tow,—and if I escape not, the Jews will scarce be questioned.”

“Tush!—thou canst easily retreat into these ruins—and the uproar which Mignel and I will raise at different extremities of the crowd will distract all attention,” returned the Borgia, and the bravo seemed at length to yield to the force of argument. He examined the lock of the arquebuss, pronounced it excellent, and finally, although with some lingering hesitation, declared his readiness to undertake the task. It was agreed that he should take the opportunity of the confusion which would be sure to follow the Lord of Fermo’s attack, to fire at the monk; after which it was certain that a tumult would arise to facilitate his escape. Meanwhile the duke and his myrmidon were to separate to opposite ends of the crowd, to misdirect the populace with their shouts. Upon this notable project they separated almost immediately, for Oliverotto was certain to put no delay in the execution of so congenial an action, as that into which he had been cajoled.

But while the conspirators rapidly settled the details of the plan, their unseen auditor was as rapidly revolving in his mind the possible means of foiling it. To rush forth, and proclaim the intended treachery would,

perhaps, in most other countries, ages, and places have been sufficient to counteract it, and bring punishment on the planners. But in this case it was more likely to secure their triumph. It was far from improbable that the projectors, finding their murderous intentions detected, would fall upon the detector unitedly, and perhaps assassinate him ere he had time to reveal their treachery. In the rancorous and mutually suspicious irritation of men's minds, the least spark might kindle an universal blaze. The fears and hatred of both parties would probably interpret the first flash of steel into a signal of preconcerted massacre or attack; and the consequences sought to be averted would inevitably follow.

The sagacious intellect of Alfonso suggested these dangers and their remedies almost simultaneously. He patiently awaited the separation of the colleagues on their enterprise, and meanwhile, under this new and appalling light, Alfonso glanced towards the Dominican with a change of every feeling which he had hitherto experienced towards him. He was now in the height of his discourse, and for the first time the Hospitaller noticed that he was preaching in Hebrew. Whether this was merely to display his profound erudition, or to captivate the inhabitants of the Ghetto by so unusual a condescension, it is certain that in Hebrew he was dis- coursing—and Hebrew which seemed now to excite a real and profound attention in the Jewish audience. It seemed to the Hospitaller, from the names he distinguished, that Fra Bruno was arraying the evidence of the prophecies in battering-rams—the usual course in convincing the uncon- vincibles of fifteen hundred years. And yet his discourse moved both himself and his audience more than the mere utterance of rabbinical glosses was likely to do. In his jealous hallucination—if such for the moment it was—Alfonso thought that the monk was much younger than he at first conjectured him to be—that the austerity and gloom of his countenance only displayed more brilliantly the irradiations of mind which illuminated it, and that his worn and gaunt figure had in it something of supernatural dignity and grandeur. He remembered the gaze with which the confessor had followed the retiring figure of his beauteous penitent; and the influence which his eloquence was likely to exercise on women was evinced in the wild and breathless attention with which the Jewish girl gazed and listened. But there was no time for reflection on the subject, for John of the Catacombs now turned his back to the crowd, knelt, and with great caution began striking a flint to kindle his matchrope.

With equal heedfulness, to avoid betraying his whereabouts, the Knight of St. John unsheathed his massive sword, and awaited the result of the worthy's labours. But the slight jar of the metal with the sheath startled the bravo's sense. He paused for an instant, and then muttering “a rat!” resumed his operation. A spark soon fell upon the tow, but as if not quite well assured as to the cause of the sound he had heard, he blew the matchrope into a glow which lighted up—not only the ruin—but the towering person of the Knight of St. John, leaning on his bare and glittering brand! With a yell as if he had seen a wild beast couched to spring at him, the bravo sprung up—and was instantly struck down with a mighty blow of the Hospitaller's gauntleted hand. He lay senseless and covered with blood on the ground; and, setting his foot on the ruffian's breast, for an instant Alfonso hesitated whether to strike the blade into it, or spare him to make a full revelation of his coadjutors' persons and purposes. The steel hung wavering over the prostrate bravo when the shrieks of a woman, and tumultuous outcries in the piazza, announced that Oliver-

otto had succeeded better in his part of the plan. There was no longer time for deliberation, and trampling with his crushing weight over the bravo's breast, Don Alfonso rushed forth in the piazza, shouting in a voice which would have been distinctly audible amidst the roar of a battle—“Christians and Jews! stir not—Christians, I am a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre;—Jews, I will rebuke this licentious brawler!” And forcing his way through the increasing confusion, a sudden hush of fear and doubt silenced the mingled mass when his powerful form was seen clambering up to the balcony, where Oliverotto held the shrieking Jewess struggling in his arms.

“Come, come, my pretty decoy-dove! what means this? I want but a little wasp of a kiss or so out of those dragon-flower lips!” said the baron, clutching the Jewish girl in spite of her struggles and continued shrieks, disregarding in his brutal eagerness all that passed below. But suddenly his shoulder was grasped as if in the teeth of a lion, and so painful was the pressure that the arm was benumbed and dropped powerless to his side; and before he could make a single effort at resistance, the powerful Hospitaller seized and hurled him over from the balcony, amidst a thunder of applause mingled with howls of derision and rage.

The populace immediately below, being the outskirts of the centre of conversion, were principally composed of Christians, and the rabble of the pilgrims. An insult to a Jewess was not likely to rouse their indignation against the perpetrator, though the prompt retribution excited merriment, and admiration of the chivalrous inflicter, but they offered no obstacles, when Oliverotto, who was but little hurt by his fall, turned ragingly round, and challenged his assailant to descend and meet him in mortal conflict. But the Dominican, perceiving the tumult and its cause, shouted to the people to secure the brawler, in the name of God and of the church. The mob obeyed, although with doubt and reluctance, and closed their ranks to obstruct the way. But Oliverotto, who had sovereign reasons to dread finding himself in the custody of the church, being Vitellozzo's beloved pupil and lieutenant, gave up his contest with the Hospitaller, and took to flight. Overthrowing the first who met him, and the rest offering no very sturdy resistance, he forced his way to one of the narrow passages of the Ghetto, and fled through it. Fra Bruno was not, however, to be so easily baffled; he had already leaped from his pulpit, and waving a silver cross in the air, he led the way in tumultuous pursuit, with a general rush of the nobles, pilgrims, Jews, and populace.

CHAPTER XX.

—“Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshap'd use of it doth move
The hearers to collection; they aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts.”—*Hamlet.*

Meanwhile the Hospitaller turned to look for the young Jewess, but she had fled into the house the instant she was released from Oliverotto's grasp, leaving her torch burning on the balcony floor. Apprehensive that terror acting on a disordered fancy might have driven her to some desperate act,—perhaps not without an impulse of curiosity,—the knight raised the torch, and stepped from the balcony into a chamber on a level with it.

It was a large but ruinously dilapidated apartment, into which the doors of a nest of smaller rooms opened, all apparently in a similar condition. The few articles of furniture were in such a state of mouldering decay as showed that they had been long out of use. There was so deep a silence in these chambers, that after a moment's intent listening, Alfonso concluded that the fugitive had not taken refuge in any of them, more especially as he discerned the massive carved posts of a staircase which probably descended to an inhabited part of the house. On approaching he perceived that it was abrupt and steep as a ladder, piercing a square hole, which scarcely allowed room for the action of the limbs, and made it necessary to descend backwards. Not much wondering at this economy of space in the limited Ghetto, the knight yet hesitated as to the propriety of adopting such a means of descent, uncertain what might await him below, or how his visit might be construed. But hearing no sound below, calling and no one replying, pity and curiosity alike urging him, he boldly continued his quest.

Descending, the Hospitaller soon found the wall behind break off, and unwilling to run the chances with his back turned, and arms powerless, he dropped the remainder of the steps. The clash of his armour rang through the desolate house, and he brushed his torch so rudely in the scramble of the fall, that it was some moments ere he could fan it into a light sufficiently strong to second his investigations. What he saw then confirmed a conjecture which he had formed from the scent of drugs and herbs, that he was in the apothecary's shop, to whom the house seemed to belong. An infinite array of dusty jars, phials emblazoned with mysterious emblems, stuffed lizards, a mummy, serpents and various strange animals preserved in liquids, which were many of them dried up, a rusty basin to bleed in, cauterizing irons, and other implements of (thank God!) antique surgery, with a leaden table, massive and shapeless as a butcher's block, in the centre, covered with cabalistical lines and figures from which to calculate the favourable instant of swallowing medicines or performing operations,—comprised the stock in trade.

The dusty and neglected aspect of the whole pharmacy indicated that the owner had not many calls on his skill, and apologized for his absence, even if it were not probable that he was one of the contubernium allotted to hear the sermon. But no other living soul appeared, and as there seemed to be no exit but by a strongly barred door and easement, closed with iron panels, after a glance over the medicinal wares, Alfonso concluded that the object of his search must have remained above. Under this persuasion he was about to remount the stairs, when he distinctly heard what seemed to be a sob or sigh from below the spot where he stood. Glancing suddenly round he perceived a slight glimmer in a large chimney-place behind, although there was certainly no fire in it; and stumbling as he went over some old crucibles in his hurry, he found, with astonishment, that the light fell from what appeared to be an open trapdoor in the back wall of the chimney, masked by the projection of the front. The same light revealed a flight of narrow steps on each side, which ascended to it.

More than ever piqued by curiosity, and insensible to the fears which would have restrained most men from gratifying it under such circumstances, Don Alfonso took only the precaution to leave his torch in one of the numerous cracks in the stones of the chimney, and rapidly climbed the steps. Stooping nearly double to enter the trapdoor, he perceived a broader flight of stairs down the inside of the wall, to the right of which

extended a dark chamber, or but very dimly lighted by some embers which glowed on a hearth opposite. This feeble radiance lighted up occasionally, and showed that the vault—for it seemed little better—was filled with a strange heap of lumber, multifarious and diversified as the contents of a cave in which wreckers had stowed the pillage of a drowned armada; perhaps lodged there as in a place of safety. Some furniture of a very mean description,—among the rest a bed overhung by a tattered tent once of rich brocade, the shelter of some princely chieftain in the field; rude articles of domestic use oddly mingled with others, which, although tarnished to blackness, seemed from their rich workmanship to be wrought in precious metals; a huge pair of bellows; a variety of strangely twisted chemical machines scattered round a cold furnace within another chimney as ample as that by which the knight entered; a large oaken wardrobe, elaborately welded with brass—were some of the objects on which he glanced. But his attention was immediately absorbed in the figure of the young Jewess, couched upon the hearth, and listening with head erect like a fawn in covert, and features startled into rationality, but still with a degree of wildness and vacuity.

Uncertain as to the effect which his appearance might produce, Don Alfonso hesitated on the summit of the stairs. But during that pause, a momentary gleam lighted up his arms, and the girl perceived him, for she sprang up, and uttered a shriek of absolute despair. There was now only a choice of evils, and the knight preferred that of descending slowly into the vault, at the same time exhorting the Jewess not to be alarmed, announcing that his intention was merely to ascertain that she was not injured by the rough handling of the unmanly wretch from whom he had rescued her. The first tones of his voice seemed to re-assure her; and looking up, she suddenly changed her cries into a wild peal of laughter, clapped her hands as if in ecstasy, and rushed to meet him. As suddenly, however, she paused, and stared at him in amazement, as if struck with his lofty stature, or with his half-warlike and half-monkish array, differing probably from any costume she had seen. “But is it really thou?” she exclaimed, after a moment’s profound pause. “‘Tis long, indeed, since we have met! but thou art now so tall—tall as a cedar!—Or art thou—who art thou?”

“I am he who rescued thee from the rude soldier in the balcony.—But didst thou expect some stranger of my tokens, that thou gazest thus at me, fair Miriam?” said the Hospitaller, very gently.

“No, no, it is not he!—No, no, he will never come again!” murmured the girl to herself, softly. “And yet he had a voice very like—full of the sweet bells that sing silvery to each other! Do not mock me, Francesco!—What needed it to come in this disguise! for indeed, dear love, I will never reproach thee,—never tell thee what I have thought of thy long absence,—and how I have wept my brain so dry, that I can never weep again, were each drop a precious pearl!—Speak, my own Francesco! and only say that it was not scorn of the poor Jewish girl that has kept thee so long away!—Speak, dearest! thou needst not fear the witches will suspect—for they tell me thou art dead and gone; and besides they are gone—gone, as thou wert wont to say, to meet the Evil One in Africa.—Nay, if thou wilt not answer me, I will get a light and see thy face. I shall know it if it is not so pale as—thy cheeks were like blowing carnations until—But no, no, no; he is dead, he is dead, he is dead!”

“Francesco!” mused the Hospitaller, and then smiled derisively at his

own sudden recollection that it was the name of the murdered Duke of Gandia—but also of almost every tenth person in Italy.

Meanwhile the Jewish girl, clinging with the tenacity of the mind diseased to its favourite visions, even when dispelled by gleams of saner memory, hurried to the hearth, and after groping about for some moments lighted a lamp shaped like a twisted dragon, and returned to the knight with great eagerness. Quietly awaiting the result of her scrutiny, he stood in silence and suffered her to survey him from head to foot. But after gazing long and wistfully at his face, she shook her head, and with a deep sigh seemed to abandon her thought, whatever it might be, and set the lamp down.

“Thou seest I am not he; but for whom didst thou mistake me, Miriam?” said the Hospitaller, earnestly—perhaps too earnestly,—for the Jewess looked at him with sudden suspicion and alarm.

“What dost thou want with him!—to betray him to the sorceresses? To the Scarlet Man with the ashy face?” she said bitterly; adding with a wild triumphant laugh, “but thou canst not; I have hidden him too well for any of you to find him; nor shall you touch him until ye have torn my heart out, and I will shriek until your God has heard as well as mine!—And He is good and just and merciful, or you Christians—Oh, you Christians!—what said the good rabbi but now?”

She reclined her chin on her hand, and seemed endeavouring to recall the Dominican’s words, or at least meaning, to mind; while Alfonso dwelt with a pertinacity which he could only ascribe to the forcible impression which the boatman’s narrative had made on his imagination, on the expression relating to the “Scarlet Man.”

“Our law is the rock of Horeb—and yours the sweet waters which gushed out of it, at which all the nations may drink peace and salvation,” murmured the Jewish girl, probably repeating the very words of the preacher. “But what is peace?—is it death?—for when he was dead—with all those cruel stabs—how calm he lay!”

There was a short pause, during which Miriam looked vacantly and inquiringly up at the knight.

“Wert thou decked out as gaily as now when—when the Scarlet Man was here?” he said at last, with hesitation.

“It was not here, thou knowest, but in the chambers above—they brought him here too—but that was in my dream,” replied Miriam. “Indeed, my lord, it was a dreadful dream!—But I was much finer than I am now, for they all loved me then, and thought diamonds too mean for me to wear; and I had no delight but to dress myself in the prettiest things, and to braid my hair, when I knew that he was coming. But they did not!”

“And was thy dream so sad?—I pray thee tell it to me, Miriam; thou seest I am as dark as cypress, and I love to hear sad tales,” said the knight.

“Oh, but I may not tell it to thee, nor to any one, or my grandames will murder me too!” replied the Jewess. “But it was very horrible!—to hear the blood go drop, drop!—to see them all run in upon him with their long keen poniards, and press them into his poor flesh, while thousands and thousands of voices—Oh, how I shrieked murder, murder, murder! until this roof rang like the clatter of hoofs at the tournament, where we saw him first! But my voice became like wool, and would not sound!—Knight, thou art in a beggar’s harness compared with him

that day! I stole out when they were busy—puff, puff, puffing—and the embers flaming, and all their bottles red hot in the glow—little dreaming that I had wandered from my wheel with Dinah and old Rebecca to see the Christian show!—But then to see them lift him up so drenched in blood that it ran down his bright hair—for when he was dead he could not keep his head up, I remember."

"And who was thy Francesco that wore such noble armour? And didst thou dream that he was murdered here—and *by thy people?*" said the Hospitaller, in a tone of carelessness which he thought would disarm the poor mad girl's suspicions.

"No, it was all a dream—a wicked dream; and I am to be punished some day in fiery mines for remembering it," she said with profound sadness, and tears trickled fast but unheeded down her face, and she seemed to sink into a puzzled reverie. The Hospitaller awaited the result in silence, hoping that some clearer revelation might rise in her chaotic memory. But suddenly she raised her eyes, wiped the tears hastily away, and looked at him with a gaze full of mingled suspicion and dread. "But yet," she said at length hesitatingly, "thou art not like the serpent that came and questioned me with his oily tongue, and whispered lies of him, and said he loved another better far, and challenged me else to win him from his appointment with her that night—the beautiful bright lady that was queen at the tournament!—but it was only one of my aunt's devils, you must know, sir,—for when he came they murdered him!"

"Loved another!—and who was she? What did men call her?" exclaimed the knight.

"Oh, she was so beautiful, that indeed it was a scorpion in my breast to hear it said! Hast thou not—come from what land thou wilt—heard of the daughter of the Christian high priest, Donna Lucrezia?"

"And thy Francesco preferred her to thee?" returned the Hospitaller, with a start.

"No, no, no!—'tis false!—he came, he came!" said the Jewess, with eyes that flashed through her tears. "Thou art a devil, too, to belie him thus, for when I told him what the serpent visage said—"

"Ay! what did he answer then?" returned the Hospitaller, breathlessly.

"Hush! didst thou not hear a step?" interrupted Miriam, staring wildly, and tossing her black hair from her shoulders to listen.

"Embers sinking on the hearth. But tell me, Miriam, I adjure thee, what said he when thou didst upbraid him with his inconstancy?"

"That was the very way they came!—I heard them creeping up the stairs, and listening and whispering, and thought it was but the wind," replied the Jewess, lifting her slender finger with a wildly startled look. "But thou art not asleep as he was!—He looked so beautiful in his sleep that it ever grieved me to waken him when the sweet dawn came, though I knew the witches would have killed him had they found him there."

"But what said he to thy gentle jealousies, fair Miriam? Did he smile?" reiterated the knight.

"Nay, I knew not till then that he could look so terrible! And he swore that if—that if—on the following day I would fly from the Ghetto to—to—whither was it?" said Miriam, pressing her forehead between her hands. "His cruel brother was to be gone then, that would have betrayed how the Christian knight had made the Jewish girl his only love—and then—he would show me, he said, how it was impossible that he should seek that lady's love, fair though she might be, and would slay

the fiend who told me so, if I could show him who it was! But even as he spoke—hark!—there are muffled feet coming up the stairs!"

"We are below stairs here, remember thee, poor Miriam!" said the Hospitaller, much agitated. "But who, then, was thy Francesco, that he boasted such power over life and death? Some great lord, doubtless. Was he one of the Orsini, whose palace is so near the Ghetto?"

"The Orsini!—there is not one of their proudest worthy to hold my Francesco's stirrup, when he mounted on his joyful steed!" returned the Jewish girl with wild enthusiasm. "So good, so beautiful, so brave!—the smile on his red lips was brighter than a ruby's sparkle, and when he looked into mine eyes, my soul dissolved away in happiness! But I dreamed of him long, long before I saw him, and there was nothing pleasant to me because I saw him not. Yet it was all a dream—else, wherefore, being so great a lord, would he never tell me more than that his name was Francesco? But what needed I to know more? He was himself, if he had had no name but his own beauty!"

"But if thou didst love him so, wouldest thou not avenge his cruel murderer?" said the Hospitaller. "Does it not darken sunshine to thee when thou markest those of thy people who were his assassins, smiling at one another with the sweet recollection of their bloody vengeance, when they meet in the market place?"

"Nay, they were demons in masks, raised by the witches, my aunts," replied Miriam, musingly. "All but one—and my Francesco tore that from the face of the Scarlet Man, to show me how it had been turned in hell to the palest ashes—paler than those of a pinewood fire when the morning shines on it."

"But that one—that one!—wert thou to behold his face again, surely thou hast not forgotten that one?" said Alfonso.

"I tell thee again! they were all devils raised by Notte and Morta to tear him to pieces—for they langhed and held me while it was all done!" returned the girl pettishly; and the recollection of the boatman's story, and the circumstance of the girl who came shrieking after the victim, pursued by two old women, recurred to him almost with the force of conviction. But still he had but his own suspicions as to who the mysterious murderer might have been. The mingling of Lucrezia's name renewed all his perplexities. Was it not possible that the jealousy of an enraged woman, not the fury of a rival, or the ambition of a younger brother, had wrought that dismal tragedy? Tales which he had heard of the strange disappearances of persons even of high rank, who were supposed to be lovers of Lucrezia, occurred to him. But this reasoning was based on a hope which now glided into his thoughts, that the Jewess's unfortunate lover was not the Duke of Gandia. The number of assassinated persons thrown nightly into the river, as into a common reservoir, permitted this dark wandering of the bright spirit; for even to find Lucrezia a murderess, rather than the worse horror which the enemies of her house represented her, appeared to him a hope. And yet the name—Francesco! The only possible solution of the direful riddle—the only possible light to be obtained—seemed to glimmer in the evanescent flashes of the Hebrew girl's half-extinguished intellect.

She watched him during his musing with a vacant sort of curiosity, carelessly weaving her long hair into ringlets.

"But when they had killed him, what did they with the gashed body?" he said at last.

"Oh, I will show thee very soon. I found out the trick when it was too late," she replied, with sudden vivacity, and darting towards the massive wardrobe which we adverted to in describing the locale, she pulled a chain, which raised a strong bolt; then opening the leaves of the wardrobe, the Hospitaller beheld with amazement, by the light of the lamp which she hastened to bring, that a stream of water flowed past between the houses and a dead wall of equal height, which was roofed in.

"And whither flows this dark stream, Miriam?" he said, looking up both ways, and ascertaining that the corridor, or covered way, extended without any apparent exit on either.

"Only the rats and the Jews are to know that," replied the girl, with a smile of simple cunning, as if she had detected and were baffling some tricksy purpose.

"Miriam, hear me!" said the Hospitaller, a thought occurring to him. "Thou hast seen that mine arm is strong!—Thou art but fooled by thy cruel grandanies to believe that demons slew thy beautiful lover—some rival among the Christians has slain him, perchance for the love of that fair lady of whom it was spoken to thee. Now, if amidst all the crowds which are assembled at these feasts of the Jubilee, thou canst or wilt point out to me those—him—who wrought this deed, I swear by all that is holy both to Jews and Christians I will avenge thee so that thou thyself shalt cry 'Enough!'"

"I cannot see them;—I go to no feasts now—the witches will not let me," she replied, with evidently startled attention.

"But is there not some secret exit contrived by thy people from the Ghetto by this stream?" said the knight. "Name but where I may find thee at to-morrow's sunrise, and I will be thy guide and champion through all their galliard shows—and we will discover the murderers of thy noble lover."

"The witches will kill me if I stir out of their house—but I never thought of this?" said the Jewess, with a deep sigh. "They say I am crazed, and must not even go into the market place now to show my pretty sparkling stones and my eyes, which were brighter far before I wept them away!"

"But if thou art crazed—if they say thou art, Miriam, it is the wont of madness to love wandering, and that may plead thine apology if even the old dames discover thou art flown from their perch awhile," returned the Hospitaller.

"Hi, hi!—but how folks will laugh to see the Christian knight and the Jewish girl together, and hoot at me and stone us both!—for so Francesco said," replied Miriam, with a faint hysterical giggle, stopped by a shower of tears.

The knight himself was for a moment perplexed.

"But who, gentle Miriam, will note us in the burlyburly? And if they do, 'tis the office and devoir of a true knight to shield and succour all women, be their nation or religion what it hath pleased God," returned the Hospitaller.

"And wilt thou, indeed, with thy strong right arm, avenge—for now I remember it was thou who rescued me from the armed man, when I was looking for Francesco in the crowd!" she replied, hurriedly.

"For Francesco!" repeated the Hospitaller, with some disappointment at this reversion of incompatible ideas.

"Yes, signor; for I said to my heart, if he is among them all—those

Christians—he will see me, and remember, and then he must needs take pity on me—at least he will tell me why he despises me so much that he never even said, ‘Miriam, I am weary of thee!’” said the Jewess, mournfully. “Why should he not even tell me why he scorned me—why he never wished to see me again? Perchance they have told him lies of me, as they will ever of poor souls who love so much they know not how to hide it; but then it needs only a word to set all right again when truth is listened to.”

“Wherefore then wilt thou not abroad with me and seek him out?” said the Hospitaller, tacking to this new gust. “When canst thou hope to see him and tell thy truths, penned up in these darksome places, where he never comes?”

Miriam looked at her adviser with a kind of wondering doubt; but she suddenly exclaimed, with eyes and features kindling with rage, “Devil! I know thee now!—thou art he who came before as the leaden-visaged Spanish liar, for all thou art so changed!—the witches have sent thee to find out who my Francesco is,—and then my dream will all come true!”

Confounded with this new turn, the Hospitaller stood for some moments in silence, scarcely noticing a slight murmur which much more vividly attracted the attention of the Jewess.

“They come, they come!” she exclaimed, in a breathless undertone, and startled into some degree of sane recollection. “Fly, fly, or we shall both be murdered!—They are all coming to take away their precious things, now the Christians are gone, and surely if they find thee here they will do murder, lest thou shouldst report their wealth to thy people!”

The whispering of several voices, and a sound as if of unlocking or unbarring the doors of the pharmacy, were distinctly audible; and brave and powerful as he was, the Hospitaller was by no means so much a paladin as to despise the danger of being surrounded by numbers, under circumstances which would prompt the kindled passions of the Hebrew population.

“Whither does this marvellous passage conduct?” he exclaimed.

“To the marsh below Palazzo Orsini, out of the walls,” replied Miriam, wringing her hands. “They come, they come!—they will not believe us—they will murder thee, and call me bitter names—follow the stream, the stream! Fly, fly!”

“I will only depart on condition that thou meetest me to-morrow in the Forum—the Ox-market as ye call it in Rome—with the early light,” returned the Hospitaller.

“Yes, yes, I will meet thee there, even if they kill me!—indeed, indeed, I swear it!” said the girl, hurriedly essaying with her feeble force to draw him to the exit.

“Swear to me by all thy hopes of seeing thy Francesco again, in heaven or on earth!” said Alfonso, hastening his own movements towards it.

“I swear—I swear!”

“But thou wilt forget!—Promise not once to look at this strange portal, but to remember thy pledge!” said the Hospitaller.

“I will—I will!—it is not deep!” she exclaimed, as the knight took the lamp, and threw its radiance on the rapid water. “‘Tis crystal pure, too, for we use it in kneading the shew-bread.—On, on!”

The knight indeed hesitated in descending the two or three steps which led to the channel, for a momentary suspicion of treachery crossed his

mind when he glanced down the watery way. But the anxious implicitness of the Jewess's countenance reassured him, and hearing the muttering gibber of the two old women's voices approaching the chamber, he pressed Miriam's hand to his heart, and descended the steps. "I will take thy lamp," he said, with a smile, "for they will scold thee for losing it, and so keep up the recollection of thy pledge."

Miriam made no reply, but by a strange laugh in which fear and a vague sense of the ridiculous mingled, and closed the opening with such rapidity that the Hospitaller was barred out before he had well concluded the observation.

He found himself perched on a loose step partially laved by the waters as they passed. The stream was not deep, unless its exceeding purity deceived the eye. Probably it flowed from some spring in the neighbouring Capitoline, and was thus carefully covered in by the inhabitants no less as a means of eluding the vigilance of their jailers, than to gratify an oriental scrupulosity in diet. That at which he had made his exit, however, appeared to Alfouso the only door opening on the water. High square holes with buckets hanging at them, suggested the means by which the neighbours took in their supplies.

Several voices of men speaking confusedly and in raised and indignant tones were now audible to the knight; and apprehending more for the girl's sake than his own, if the gleam of his torch should be observed through the chinks, he shaded it, and stepped into the channel. It was deeper than he had at first conjectured, flowing over his knee; but carefully pebbled, and somewhat raised in the centre. Proceeding along this line, and reconnoitring as he advanced, he saw that the water flowed down so rapid an inclination that but for the intervention of numerous dams it must have become very shallow.

Alfonso began to muse on the probabilities that the stream would terminate in some deep cistern or reservoir. A dark thought assailed him that he was perhaps barred in a place whence there was no exit, and where he might miserably perish; for the importance of the secret which he had discovered of their hidden wealth, would drive the Jews to desperation, so that a return through their quarters was impossible. Still it was not likely that a project so treacherous and malignant could enter the bewildered fancy of the young Jewess; considering, too, the poignant recollections which she seemed to preserve of a former scene of bloodshed and betrayal. This thought conjured up a vision of the horrible tragedy in the knight's imagination, and so vividly, that the flashes of the lamp on the water startled him at times as if they were gouts of blood speeding past. So strongly did this fancy work that once he thought he heard shrieks, and paused to listen.

Perhaps it was still but the sport of imagination on his excited organs, but it seemed to him as if he heard remote halloos and shouts, above all which was distinct the voice of Miriam, repeating her "Fly, fly!" in accents of frantic warning. If she were indeed urging on his flight, or merely giving way to the vagaries of delirium, was of equal portent, and The Hospitaller hastened on.

But a greater perplexity shortly awaited him. The dark way suddenly terminated. A wall as high as the roofing was before him, beneath which, at a low massive archway scarcely high enough to allow it, the waters crept out of the Ghetto. The knight could scarcely bring himself even to imagine that the Israelites got out of their inclosure by crawling under

this arch, at the hazard of being suffocated in the water. Still he could discern no other way, and his heart beat high with feelings very unusual in that stout breast, when he approached to satisfy himself by a diligent search that there was no other possible exit.

Approaching the arch, he was almost instantly struck by observing that there were stones jutting out at intervals so as to make an easy ascent of a few steps to the top of its curve. Satisfied that there was a use for this contrivance, though he could as yet perceive none, Alfonso mounted the stairs, and reaching the summit of the arch in two or three strides, he stood amazed at the ingenuity of the trick which he discovered. The wall instead of resting on the arch, as it seemed at a distance, was separated from it by a space sufficiently wide to allow the stoutest man to drop between. Then by stooping double it was possible to pass under a second archway, much higher than the first, to which by an illusion of perspective it seemed to be joined, when viewed from the exterior. The blue darkness at the extremity convinced the knight that he should then be in the open air.

He delayed but little after this discovery, and passing without much difficulty beneath the outer arch, emerged, as he expected, outside the walls of the Ghetto. A sedgy marsh through which the stream crept into the Tiber,—the river and its island covered with massive ruins and cypresses standing motionless in the windless air,—were before him.

Concluding that if he kept by the wall he should reach some gate into the Ghetto, at which he might enter to learn what had happened in the pursuit of the Jewess's assailant, he took that course. Startling the waterfowl which had built their nests on the deserted shore, and avoiding the numerous pools of stagnant water by their glare in the moonlight, the knight at length reached a scattered suburb of mean cottages, all silent and emptied of their sight-seeing dwellers. Then came a succession of narrow and equally deserted lanes, passing through some of which he suddenly emerged in an open square. Great numbers of people were thronging into it from various quarters. One side of the space was occupied by a lofty palace, or rather fortress, for it was mounted with cannon, and secured by massive walls. Remembering that the Orsini palæe was raised on the ruins of an ancient Roman theatre, and contrasting the grand Grecian architecture of the lower storeys of the pile with the Gothic battlements and towers which ran above, the Hospitaller had little doubt that he stood before the stronghold of that powerful race.

He listened for an instant to the hubbub of conversation around him, and soon found that the mob were of those who had been in the Ghetto. He inquired of one of the loudest and most gesticulating of the incomers, who happened to be our worthy little friend Paschino, the tailor, what the matter was.

“Matter enough! when a Christian may not even honour a Jew girl with a kiss but he must be hunted like a water-rat!” replied Paschino, who was nothing, if not critical. “Besides, it was a trick to get up a tumult, that the Jews might cut all our throats in their narrow macaroni lanes. At first, the noble gentlemen about the preacher (bless their thick skulls!) would have it that one of their acquaintance had rescued the girl; and they ransacked the Jew's house, but found nobody in it—not even the wench. And while we are all busy looking for them like fools as we were born, in gallipots and rat-holes, came in two old hags who looked as if

they had been to have their beards singed in hell, and swore that their niece was mad, and must have run out of the house. Wherenpon I told them that they were not mad who left, but who stayed in such a musty pomegranate; and Fra Bruno, seeing people's temper rise, seized his cross, and commanded us one and all to troop it out of the Ghetto, and those who hesitated he drove before him—and so here we are all!"

"And the fellow who caused the disturbance escaped?" said the knight.

"Of course—and who *should* escape but the guilty?" returned Paschino.

"And Fra Bruno has taken refuge with the Orsini in their palace?" said Don Alfonso.

"Refuge!—why should Fra Bruno take refuge?" replied the tailor. "Unless indeed from the envy of his thickhead brethren, which has driven him, they say, to live as a hermit on Mount Aventine, in the ruins of the baths there,—whither he is now gone after giving us all more than my mother thought necessary for me at least,—a blessing."

"Mount Aventine!—surely he hath not gone alone to that desert!" said the knight, startled with his recollection of the attempt to assassinate the friar.

"Worse than alone, for he hath the fat fool, Biccocco, with him," said Paschino. "'Tis strange how fond these deeply wise men are of the company of fools!—and yet he shuns the society of women worse than that of black vipers!"

"He is in danger, if he hath no other company," exclaimed the Hospitaller. "Canst thou guide me to these ruins, Paschino, where he has his hermitage?"

"Yea, like a sign-post, than which I will stir no more over that ground by night!" replied the tailor. "Let those go the journey that have business at the end of it,—let the arrow fly that has a mark! I have heard enough how he treats his disciples!—certes, not with loaves and fishes; nay, what is rarer, he declines them himself, though confessor to a lady who has cause no doubt to be grateful for absolutions. Perhaps, indeed, he has not yet been offered aught large enough for his appetite, for you don't catch wolves with almond-cakes."

"It were charity in thee to guide me on his way, for I have reason to believe the good man's life is in danger," returned the knight, eagerly.

"Nay, for he is said to be so skilful an anatomist and physician, that he might take a fancy to see how I came to be so small.—And your Spaniards when they set about a thing have as much mercy as carrion-ewoks picking the eyes of a dying horse," said Paschino, with a start.

"Is Fra Bruno a Spaniard?" returned the Hospitaller.

"Is the devil a Dutchman!—who knows not that? How else should he climb to honours in Italy, and be the right hand of my Lady Donna Lucrezia?"

The latter part of this question revived the recollection of the pilgrim of Compostella's observations on the monk, and of the pressing nature of the peril which beset him. Alfonso renewed his request, but his earnestness rather gave the tailor suspicions of his intentions, than any inclination to second them. Perhaps even he thought that the knight himself was on an errand of no good import to Fra Bruno, whose doctrines were already suspected to have brought him into bad odour in the Vatican. Such was

the terror which the Borgian tyranny had infused, that the poor tailor was seized on the thought with a grievous panic. Finally, he acted like the labourer in the fable who promised not to tell the huntsman where the deer lay, and only pointed to its refuge. He described the way to the monk's hermitage, and took the opportunity of a general commotion in the crowd, caused by two men who had drawn daggers on some slight quarrel, and slunk out of sight.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
And *there* hath been thy bane. . . .
And who can view the ripened rose, nor seek
To wear it? who can curiously behold
The smoothness and the sheen of beauty's cheek,
Nor feel the heart can never all grow old?”

Taking the route indicated by the gibing tailor, the knight gradually cleared himself of the mob from the Ghetto, and passed through several streets in which only a few devotees crossed his path, gliding from shrine to shrine. What his own object was he could scarcely have said. To warn the confessor of his danger, and to use the interest which he might acquire by the service in obtaining some light on his perplexities, even of that involuntary sort which looks and gestures yield—curiosity and humanity—were motives so inextricably mingled that he could not have decided which was the strongest.

So lost in thought went he, that learned as, considering the age, he might be called, Don Alfonso passed through the deserted valley between the Palatine and Aventine, without ever noticing that the ruined arches scattered so far along the way were the remains of the famous Circus Maximus. Silence more profound—desolation more complete—the deserts of Palmyra could not have offered, for both were deepened rather than broken by the distant hum of the agitated city. A few shepherds' huts, and ruins, then as now possessed this hill, which had once been covered with palaces.

Gradually all traces of a road vanished, and on each side were woody acclivities, covered with ruins and melancholy cypresses. The only guide of the Knight of St. John was now a small stream which traversed the valley, and which Paschino had informed him flowed very near the ruins of which he was in search. The guide indeed was faithful, and after murmuring through a deep wood, the underwood of which was chiefly of wild roses in full blossom, it conducted him into a verdant desert, in the midst of which the vast ruins of the Baths of Caracalla are scattered. For a few minutes the knight stood breathlessly gazing at the immense destruction—the wilderness of shattered arches, lonely columns, useless porticoes, fallen walls, or but standing in parts like jagged towers attesting the former height of the whole—which stretched beneath his gaze.

The hopelessness of searching among these unknown masses for the Dominican's hermitage, struck Alfonso instantly; and he would probably have returned on his steps, but that he chanced to perceive a figure advancing out of the ruins, as if coming towards the city. Hoping that it might prove either some follower of the monk, or peasant acquainted with

the locality, he hastened to meet the stranger, who came on, muttering and crossing himself, as if at prayer, and so lost in his devotions that he took no notice of the knight until he was within a few yards of him. Alfonso had seated himself, in expectation of his approach, on the half-buried capital of a pillar, and rising suddenly, his apparition excited so much terror in the beholder, that he uttered a terrific yell, and fled! But in that instant Alfonso had recognized the bravo of the Ghetto, and was about to rush in pursuit, when a light suddenly appeared among the ruins, and a voice quaggy with fat and alarm called out, "What ails thee, brother?"

Alfonso dreaded that the mischief he had come to prevent was already done, but confiding in the terror which his appearance seemed to diffuse, he pushed forward, and discerned by the glare of a torch which he carried the goodly rotund visage of Fra Biccocco, white and seething with alarm.

"In the name of the Five Wounds who art thou?" gasped the friar, after staring agape for several moments.

"It matters nothing to my purpose, father; lead me to the presence of Fra Bruno; my business is with him," replied the knight. "Is he well, or hath aught happened to him?"

"O worthy knight!—thou art not that devil in human form to break up so peerless a vessel of light as my dear master!—Holy Thomas Cantarueensis protect us!—but art thou here to do murder on that precious torch of theology?"

"Rather to save him from murderers—extinguishers, if thou wilt.—But whence came that villain who but now passed me?" returned the knight.

"From confession with my blessed brother, the ornament and glory of our order," said the friar, breathlessly.

"If yonder assassin hath been with the good father, he is dead!" exclaimed the knight. "And this I tell you, who am the soldier of the cross who rescued the Jewess in the Ghetto."

"*Sancta Maria, mater Dei, ora pro nobis!*—what have I done, a sinner, to merit this celestial honour?" said Fra Biccocco, kneeling before the astonished Hospitaller. "If it was St. Michael who saved that candle of the faith, as the villain swore, and thou art he—*probatum est; ora pro nobis!*"

"Thou art mad, friar; the villain's fears have deceived him, or he has but fooled you to gain access to your master and slay him.—Doubtless he is even now weltering in his blood!" returned the knight, despite the horror of his suspicions almost laughing at his sudden canonization. "Lead me to him, I conjure thee—albeit, I fear all help will come too late!"

Ideas were never very fast arranging themselves in Fra Biccocco's repertory, but this one was so clear and so emphatically stated that it dispelled in an instant his superstitious fancies, and convinced him that he was speaking to a form of flesh and blood like himself, although not so fat. Then the dread that his ornamental superior was murdered took possession of his mind, and he trembled all over like a man in an ague fit, or rather like a jelly on a shaking sideboard. Quaking he stood and gazed with undiminished suspicion at the stranger, not daring either to take to flight or to remain. It was some minutes before the latter, by the most earnest protestations mingled with threats to his own personal damage,

prevailed on Fra Biccocco to guide him to Bruno's cell—not knowing whether to behold a tragedy or to accelerate one.

The friar led the way with many a shuddering retrospect, being in great doubt whether it was not intended to stab him behind, through the central masses of ruin, beneath unnumbered shattered arches. Viewing the interminable alleys of pillars and colonnades and chambers which extended on either side, it seemed as if time alone could not have wrought that prodigious destruction—that an earthquake must have assisted. Once or twice they startled a sleeping goat in the aisles of the ruin, or an owl shot with a wild hoot over the monk's torch; else they encountered no living object to break the sepulchral desolation.

At length Fra Biccocco turned to the right beneath the remains of a triumphal portico, on each side of which stood the headless statues of two Roman emperors. Thence he entered into a wilderness of grottoes, the broad corridors of which were at times almost choked with odiferous shrubs and wild flowers, which poured their generous sweetness on the desert around without stint or measure. He stopped at last at what probably had once been a principal entrance to the baths, judging by the remains of the magnificent columns before it; ascended a flight of grass-grown steps, and entered a series of desolate chambers, which although roofless and choked with ruins and rank vegetation, bore traces of their ancient dedication. These terminated before a pile of archways ascending in various stages of ruin much higher than the surrounding masses, with an entrance secured by a very clumsily manufactured door. The friar pushed it hastily open, and admitted his companion into a chamber which had been one of the principal baths, but was now very singularly occupied, partly as a hermitage and partly as the studium of a philosopher. High unglazed holes admitted light and air together, and with the aid of the friar's torch and the dull reflection of a dying fire, revealed various apparatus of chemistry and anatomy, books, telescopes, and other learned instruments, oddly mingled with crosses, disciplines or scourges, rude drawings of the Virgin and saints, culinary implements, two beds or rather lairs of reeds, a block for a table, and two stools.

Without pausing to allow his companion time to note any minor details of the scene, Fra Biccocco crossed the chamber to an opposite door, opening which a square inclosure of ruins appeared. "Brother Bruno! brother Bruno! in mercy's name, if you are alive, speak!" exclaimed the friar, but no voice replied. "Oh, he is in Heaven!—he is in Heaven!" exclaimed the poor monk, sobbing at the thought as if his heart would break. "Ah, little thought I, and woe the hour, when he mounted those stairs to his little cell, that he was only going so far on his way to the sky! But at least spare me, good knight; for now he is gone I am of no more significance than the shadow of a straw! He was my teacher, my master, my prop, my glory, my light!—and now I am only a biscuit for a dog!"

"What stairs?" returned the knight, snatching the torch, and throwing its light forward he perceived the remains of a flight of steps, overhung by laurel trees and juniper bushes, which ascended the ruins.

"His lamp is still burning, but he himself is blown out by the devil's breath!" groaned the friar, looking up. "Mercy, mercy, signor cavaliere, on a poor Christian who does not know you, and has no longer any business on the earth!"

"There is blood on these steps indeed!" said the knight, passing the

torch over some dark cloths on the weeds which rankly clothed them.

"I remember me the bravo was badly wounded ; pray all the saints it be his blood—I would not grudge a sea of it!" returned the bewildered friar.

"Give me thy torch, I will learn : and if thou fearest for thine own safety, stay below," said the Hospitaller, springing up the steps with a rapidity which soon placed him on a platform above, leaving Biccucco invoking all the saints in the calendar by name.

The ray of a torch streaming from a perforation in front guided Alfonso to the sanctum of Fra Bruno, but in his eagerness he nearly slipped down a chasm yawning in the way, before he perceived that it was necessary to take a slight detour to reach the chamber in safety. He arrived immediately before a square opening from which the light came, and raising himself on tiptoe he looked into the chamber with almost the certainty knocking at his ribs that he was about to gaze upon a scene of horror.

But it was not so : it was a large chamber strewed with still more curious and cabalistical instruments than the vault below. About the middle was a table covered with books and writing materials ; and directly in front was an altar, decorated with singular taste, hung with magnificently embroidered velvet, and set with antique vases of great beauty full of flowers. A crucifixion, wrought in fine gold, hung above the altar, and before it knelt the monk, apparently whole and sound, but in such an ecstasy of devotion that it seemed as if a cannon discharged in the cell could scarcely have broken it. He was praying aloud, and partly in awe and partly in curiosity the Hospitaller listened ; and his prayer seemed to be a rhapsody of thanksgiving for the encouragement given him in overcoming all weakness of the flesh, and strength bestowed for some great task in hand. But it struck the Hospitaller chiefly that in the course of this rapt overflow he heard the name of Lucrezia more than once.

So mundane a word broke the spell ; but it was with a much increased confidence in the holy man whom he had thus beheld at unawares more devout than in the presence of his admirers, that Alfonso looked around for some entrance to the cell. This was easily found, for it was a narrow archway without a door, through which the Knight of St. John boldly stepped, exclaiming as he appeared, "Your pardon and blessing, father ! on one whose weighty business alone emboldens his interruption."

The Dominican started, glanced round, and sprang up, and for a moment his sallow cheek grew paler yet, and his right hand convulsively grasped the rope of his girdle, as if he had expected to find some weapon there. A spasmodic smile then crossed his lips, and folding his arms on his breast, and turning his eyes upward until all but the white disappeared, he said—"Strike!—since this is the only redemption Heaven can give my struggling soul—strike!"

"Do you then forget me, father ? One of those travellers to whom you rendered a signal service at the falls of Velino, which he is rejoiced to have it now in his power to return," replied the knight in a reverential tone.

"Thou!—the Knight of St. John!—Art thou sent by heaven or by hell?" said Fra Bruno, starting at the voice from his attitude of fixed endurance, and darting a wild and glaring gaze at his visitor.

"Doubtless from Heaven, since I come to do service to so faithful a son of the church," returned Alfonso.

"Speak thy purpose then—or do it!" said the monk, with an agitation which the immediate apprehension of death had caused him.

The Hospitaller judiciously replied by giving a brief account of the attempt at assassination which he had frustrated in the Ghetto, not, however, mentioning his suspicions of the instigator, to observe if the monk's consciousness would suggest that of his dire enemy. As he spoke, a smile of bitter mirth stole over Fra Bruno's gloomy features.

"It was no armed angel, then, as worthy John of the Catacombs had nigh persuaded me—it was thou!" he exclaimed, with strange wildness. "Oh, now indeed am I shorn of my strength, and am at sea again in the tossing tempest of my thoughts! But believing, instead of murdering me he came to implore my forgiveness, and confess his crime, concealing only the name of his instigator, which yet I can freely guess, since it was not the fiend himself."

"And the bravo has confessed to you the crime he meditated against yourself!" exclaimed the knight, not without surprise, familiar as the marvellous workings of superstition were to all men in that age. "But what had you done against his prompter, who seemed to be a personage of high degree, that he should thirst for your blood?"

"He knows that I know him to be a devil—and he would have the world to think that he is a man," replied the Dominican, sedately.

"But, father, he seemed to be some irritated husband, accusing you of having caused a divorce—and impeaching your motives therein most blackly!" said the knight, continuing his scrutiny.

"A divorce?—but it is true!—and who that finds a canker worm in a matchless rose but would tear it out and crush it!" replied the monk, his pale complexion slightly mantling. "Yet, if I mistake not, the complainer was not that wretched thing whom you glorify by styling her husband! Signor, I acknowledge the offence with pride, and since you gaze at me thus earnestly, I will add—but nay, the secrets of the confessional are sacred!—let it pass."

"At least, then it was not Alexander nor Cæsar who caused that first divorce," mused the Hospitaller, whose suspicions, lightened in that direction, darkened against the monk. "But, father," he continued, "It behoves you perchance to take some measures against the scandals which your enemy scatters, insinuating that your interference was prompted by an unholy passion for the wife whom you incited to throw off the yoke of—it might be—an ill-assorted marriage."

"Ha!—and who will believe such a tale of an old bald-headed friar, skilled only in musty manuscripts, whose life hath been one long despair—and of a woman in the full flush and glow of youth and beauty, whose bosom pants for pleasure more restlessly than the golden seas of Italy to reach their sunny skies?" replied the Dominican, with a fearful kindling of the eye, and a hectic flame burning over his face.

"Nay, father, but it is known—whether women are, as their eulogists at times affirm, of a finer and more spiritual essence than ours; or whether, as a contrary sect misdoubt, their mental inferiority disposes them to an extravagant admiration of intellectual greatness;—certain it is that women have ever been more abjectly subject to its magic than men," returned the subtle Hospitaller. "In such a love there were no guilt, but even a foretaste of the celestial calm of that in Heaven!"

"Ay, but the fire and clay are so closely ~~headed~~ in humanity—the dross and gold!—the soul is debased to the qualities of its earthly habita-

tion ; the immortal is enslaved by the mortal ! ” said the friar, with extreme bitterness. “ Say what the Platonist may—man is more than half beast—and knows only that he is spirit too by discovering that there are infinite longings within him which his bestial enjoyments but mock with momentary glimpses of fulfilment ! Yet the love of which thou speakest—spiritual and pure as the soul—might be eternal too as it ! —might be the love of the blessed—were it returned ! —But women—say what thou wilt of their reverence of mind—understand not love like this, or—yes, reverence ! —they revere mind, but they love—carcass ! ”

“ Yet they are happy who speak thus from observation—not experience,” replied Alfonso, jealously concluding that it was jealousy which thus bitterly tinged the confessor’s discourse.

“ They only then of all creatures rational, if I may credit my experience, that have looked into the diseased heart of humanity with a mediciner’s eye,” said the Penitentiary, more calmly. “ But this is not to the point :—it seems I owe you my life, and should thank you for it, nor will I tell tell you now how little I value it, lest you should deem that I would underrate the gratitude I owe.”

“ Speak not of gratitude, father, for I intend that you shall soon overpay me,” returned Alfonso. “ So violent a close would ill have fitted a life so calm and passionless as yours, which to a soldier were a natural climax.”

“ Thou deemest, then, there are no passions but such as take outward forms of action ?—None which like the Spartan’s fox gnaw the heart beneath the mantle ? ” replied the Dominican, smiling gloomily. “ No troubles of the mind only—no tempests of the soul ? What if my calumniator spoke the truth—not of me—but of one in my place ? Dost thou know what hell there might be even in the confidence and trust which the object of the unhallowed passion reposed—demonstrations of its hopelessness more certain than any language could bestow ? Is it nothing, deemest thou, to make the lips ice-cold in a kiss of tranquil benediction when the heart is on fire ?—To see a woman kneel at your feet before whose adorable beauty ! —but men rave for the most part who talk out of their knowledge, and by your eyes I see that I do—You said, my son, that it was in my power somewhat to repay you ? ”

“ I said so, and—but I scarcely know how to shape my asking, so strange it is—but at least I may confide in your secrecy, father ? ” said Alfonso, who, with all his subtlety, scarcely knew how to commence what he desired to say.

The Dominican pointed emphatically to the crucifix on his altar, and after a short pause said mildly, “ Speak, my son ;—I listen, and none else on earth.”

“ Men say that you are profoundly skilled in casuistry, and learned in all doctrine, so that your words set the soul to rest on every controversy,” began the Hospitaller, hesitatingly.

“ Well, they say so—men say many things—this among the rest,” said the friar, seemingly but little flattered by the compliment. “ To your purpose—for only time stands between men and eternity ! ”

“ Then, father, I would know whether it is damnable for men to endeavour to ascertain matters which being known might tend to the destruction of the Church by destroying all reverence for its chief ministers and incarnations ? ” replied Alfonso.

The Penitentiary was for a moment silent, and a somewhat strange expression passed over his countenance.

"Truth is the rock on which the church is founded," he said at last. "Therefore the truth cannot harm her; therefore if the *truth* is sought—but what is that!—what is the truth?" he concluded, with singular wildness.

"Ay, that, father, is the point which you alone, of all mankind, perchance, can resolve me," returned the Hospitaller. "Listen to me, and I will expound myself under sanction of your promises.—I am the secret envoy of Alfonso of Ferrara, whose aversion to his sire's and the French king's project of wedding him to the daughter of the Borgias is so great, that I am in Rome solely to win for him some certain proof of the monstrous guilt laid to her charge, to excuse him in their eyes for refusing compliance. You, father, are the confessor of the illustrious lady;—if truth cannot harm the church, can certainties on this matter?"

The Penitentiary listened with profound attention, but on this sudden conclusion he glanced with astonishment at the questioner, and their eyes met in a kind of concussion of thought from which both hastily withdrew them.

The monk made no direct reply, which indeed Alfonso scarcely expected; but a gleam of satisfaction lighted his visage as he said, after a short silence, "Strange, indeed!—But you have seen her, and do you persist in this your black errand?"

"Oh, she is fairer than the light; and could she but be cleared of the direful charges against her, Alfonso of Ferrara—it were not in humanity to resist such loveliness!" exclaimed the Hospitaller, involuntarily yielding to his enthusiasm.

"Indeed, indeed, I know not that!" replied the Dominican, hurriedly. "But know you not the obligations of the confessional, to which yet you have appealed, and hope that for less than a direct mandate from Heaven I will betray its secrets?"

"I am answered sufficiently in that refusal—to admit a negative were to break none of its laws," replied Alfonso, despairingly.

"A negative may affirm—I have replied nothing," said the confessor, much agitated. "Let us be very patient;—tell me, what are the accusations you bring against this youthful lady?"

"Not mine, father, but the whisperings which are heard all over Italy," replied the Hospitaller, shuddering at the impossibility which he felt of putting his suspicions into plain language. "They say that she hath fortunate lovers—whom she loves?" continued the knight, somewhat vacantly, in his embarrassment.

"She loves not—she never hath loved!" interrupted Bruno, vehemently. "And for her lovers, it is false! This at least I may tell you—for who can doubt there is some dark power which surrounds her with an atmosphere of death and fatality?—Some secret and demoniac energy, which like a mandrake near a treasure blasts with its hidden poisons all who approach?"

"But the charm were broken if Donna Lucrezia weds the heir of the Orsini?" returned the Hospitaller.

"The marriage fixes her in Rome," replied the Dominican, with so dark a glance that it suddenly struck the Hospitaller he might be thus prompting and seconding his suspicions in dread of the alleged possibility of a change in the resolution of the Prince of Ferrara, contingent on the clearing up of his suspicions.

"But if the pontiff was sincere in his urgent proposals to Duke Hercules—he meant her to leave Rome for ever," he replied.

"And if the sky above us should fall—it would cover many an iniquity!" said the monk, hurriedly. "The Orsino himself has already escaped from a sharp hazard, albeit I know that Donna Lucrezia hath no manner of liking to him, and yields but to sway in this planned alliance."

"And he escaped partly by thine aid, father," returned the knight. "For certes thou art the Dominican friar who guided us to the cavern where Paolo Orsino was confined?"

Fra Bruno looked for a moment much disconcerted, but the certainty in the eye of his questioner was evidently not to be shaken.

"What if I admit so much—do not betray me to an irksome gratitude," he replied. "The dark heavings of men's consciences oft cast their secrets up to my ken."

While Fra Bruno made this admission, aided, by his new lights the memory of the Italian prince reverted with suspicion to the circumstance of the earnestness with which the monk had desired them to go to the monastery for assistance—where they had found the Duke of Romagna, with a force quite adequate to foil their intentions, and expose themselves to great hazard.

"I am answered merely if you tell me that Cæsar intended the destruction of his future brother, now that the necessity of his affairs so strongly prompt him to the alliance," said Alfonso, with a deep throb of the heart.

"And this question I may not answer," replied the Dominican.

"Albeit I tell you—what indeed it seems you know—that it was Cæsar himself who attempted your life to-night!" said the Hospitaller, thrown off his guard by his own vehemence.

"And didst thou know this, and—indeed, but thy master has chosen his envoy well!" returned Fra Bruno, evidently startled. "But as I have said, I cannot answer you on these points:—men are to judge only of men's actions—God and His church of their intentions!"

"Yet at least in the matter of my theological doubt—" began Alfonso.

"Tempt me no more! I have made up my soul to endure whatever may be rather than again—leave me—tempt me no more!" exclaimed the monk, with sudden wildness,

"I tempt you to no sin, but rather to a saintly work, redeeming perchance a limed soul from the the snares of Satan!" returned the knight.

"Nay, if the devil come in an angelic form, who can resist him?" said Fra Bruno, in a voice full of the echoes of despair. "But hear me, and judge whether I am the oracle you deem me. Hear me—the great theologian, when I confess to you that I know not, in mine own labours, whether I am inspired by a god or a demon!—whether in exposing the abuses of Christianity I am not mining its whole fabric!—whether, instead of tidings of salvation, I am not scattering the seeds of damnation on all the winds!—whether I am a reformer or a destroyer!—whether my wages will be life or death!—whether the denunciation I intended to deliver tomorrow before assembled Christianity (since it seems I was saved by no miracle) be prompted by heaven or by hell!"

"They err not then that ascribe to you some taint of the heresies of Savonarola?" said the knight, despite his strong nerves shrinking a little back.

"Savonarola deserted Heaven, not Heaven Savonarola—a vessel too weak to endure the furnace!" replied the monk, kindling with enthusiasm,

and continuing to speak in a rapt tone. "But who says that I lack signs to support me in my task? What if revenge first prompted, did not the dream visit me in my youth when my soul was pure? Is it not against every yearning of the flesh—every hope of earthly recompense—in defiance of every temptation? Have I not been preserved to it by miracle this night—for 'tis not the less a miracle that is wrought by human agency? Is not my soul set at rest on its stormiest headland even by—evil that good may come! how is that?" he broke off as if awaking from a dream.

"Then, father confessor, you avow that you can give me no assistance in brightening the reputation of your beauteous penitent?" said Alfonso.

"Of what do ye accuse her?" returned the monk, with a piercing glance. "Is it that you expect me to swear that in an age so depraved, a court so corrupt, beneath skies like these of Italy, a woman more beautiful than all her sex is also more honest?"

"Nay, it would content me could you say that she is not more vile," returned the Hospitaller, warmly.

"I am but little versed in the sex, and know not how to reply—a book-worm monk—what counsel can I give on such matters?" replied Fra Bruno, with a sardonic smile. "When you can tell me the limits of female wickedness, then I will tell you whether Lucrezia has passed them."

"Then is it possible to be a thing more dire than these lines declare her," said the Hospitaller, and glad to shroud his meaning under a language which, being dead, could not blush, he repeated the lines which it seemed haunted his memory—

"Lucretia, nomine, sed re
Thaïs, Alexandri filia, sponsa, nurus."

"Thou hast seen Lucrezia—and thou believest in these words?" said the monk, gazing with a strange eagerness and incredulity at his questioner.

"I have seen and believe them the more!" returned Alfonso, with at least equal anxiety.

"Why then"—said Fra Bruno, and he paused during one long moment in which the struggle of powerful passions rendered his usually calm visage absolutely fearful. "Why then—believe it still—and be content!"

The shock of lightning entering his frame could scarcely have vibrated more fearfully through every nerve of Alfonso than these terrible words, which confirmed his worst fears, from the confessor of Lucrezia Borgia. His emotion was visible to the monk, who, however, only turned coldly away, and said, "You saved my life—I have put you now in the way of the rewards due to a successful ambassador, from your munificent prince."

Alfonso endeavoured to summon energy to utter his thanks with composure, when luckily as he began to speak, an hysterical laugh of joy, mingled with sobs and exclamations of delight, startled them both. Fra Biccoco appeared crawling in at the doorway on his hands and feet, having at length summoned courage to ascend and learn the worst.

Quelling the emotion of his faithful attendant with a few words of rebuke, and satisfying his senses that he was alive and well, Fra Bruno turned to the Hospitaller and asked if he would accept such poor accommodation for the night as his hermitage afforded. "It were dangerous to pass the desert Aventine in the dark, if this rogue has begun to unbeatify you, signor," he said, with a melancholy smile. "But I remember,—

you are a soldier and must not know fear; and therefore stay to be my guard. I cannot indeed play the host, for I must to my interrupted toil, which will probably last me out the night-stars: but brother Biccocco is a much better convoy to good cheer than brother Bruno."

"And that is true enough, for of all the delicate cates sent us by Madonna Lucrezia, on occasion of to-morrow's blessed feast—" began the good friar, but Fra Bruno impatiently interrupted him by desiring him, before he went to rest, to bring him another lamp. Biccocco took the hint, and turned to guide the knight to the chamber below.

Not vainly had Fra Bruno vaunted the capabilities of his attendant; for the good man, once convinced that his guest was a creature of flesh and blood, bestirred himself anxiously to promote his comfort as such; but never was there a greater contrast than in the fat, loquacious, good-hearted and ignorant friar to his master. He talked incessantly, even when blowing the fire through a reed, chiefly descanting on the praises of his superior, but diversifying his talk with eulogiums of the viands which he set on the table. And in truth they were of an excellency and refined cookery which supported his assertion that all came from the kitchens and cellars of Donna Lucrezia.

Fra Biccocco's jubilate on the favour enjoyed by his master with Donna Lucrezia, confirmed by these abundant signs, did not much delight the hearer; and yet, by an amazing contradiction, it had become almost a hope with him to discover that the Dominican had motives of jealousy to prompt his revelation to him in his character of envoy from the Prince of Ferrara. And thus for some time, instead of listening to Biccocco's discourse, he was lost in moody reverie; but at last the viands were ready, and the friar invited Alfonso to commence. He himself, with a sigh, began to eat a little bread and some onions, savouring the repast with water from an earthen pitcher, to which he set his lips with slight relish, and a woful glance at the Hospitaller's brimming tankard of wine.

"Nay, if you will not join me, I will join you, brother," said Alfonso, in his perplexity hoping that he might extract some ray of light from the friar's loquacity.

"Not so, brother; this is a vigil of the church, on which it behoves us to set the laity an example," replied the good monk, with a somewhat rueful look at his pitcher. "But you, who have no occasion to set yourself up as a light on a rock, drink while you are able, for no man drinks for ever; nor will you fill your cup from every brook with such stuff as you have there—wine of Chios, fruity as treacle, presented by my dear lady and princess, Donna Lucrezia, whose soul the saints keep in paradise when it goes there!"

"Nay, but you are host as well as monk—and what example do you set to your guest, scarce wetting your lips with that thin potion?" replied the knight. "Did not your superior as good as bid you join me in all lawful conviviality; moreover, this is the eve of the jubilee, though it be Lent; and I trust we have that share in our brother's fasting above to excuse our own; and the wine is of a marvellous quality. So if thou wilt not pledge me, neither will I drink alone—a drunkard's not a merry companion's wont."

Thus pressed, Fra Biccocco could no longer refuse without being guilty of inhospitality—a sin at least equal to breaking a self-imposed fast. One quaff introduced that which followed; and as the engrossing topic of the friar's mind was a devote admiration of the superior whom he attended,

his talk ran all on that subject. Many curious particulars of the life and manners of the Dominican, whom he evidently looked upon as a man destined to be first pope, and then saint, did Fra Biccocco relate. And almost every anecdote he heard raised contrary doubts and opinions in the mind of Don Alfonso.

It seemed that Fra Bruno was believed to be a native of Spain, although his patronymic of Lanfranchi would seem to mark at least an Italian parentage. At all events he had resided for many years in that country, engaged it was thought in the study of physic, in which science the Moorish and Jewish schools of the south were then renowned, and which was still his favourite relaxation from his more profound theological pursuits. In the pursuit of the recondite mysteries of this art, and of its sister, chemistry, Fra Biccocco modestly intimated that he had always been of singular service to his superior; and he dilated on his own knowledge in herbs and minerals, and in the conduct of the operations of the science. Wonderful in their nature were many of these, as Fra Biccocco averred, rising to fill the knight's tankard (which he shared) for the fourth time.

Biccocco related that it was in the midst of mundane studies like these, while yet young, and fast acquiring an universal renown by his attainments, that Fra Bruno was seized with a profound disgust for the world, and became a monk. Several subsequent years he spent in wandering in remote and heathen lands, spreading the tidings of salvation, until as the good friar declared, he received an extraordinary call, to the effect, as he more mysteriously hinted, that he was destined to turn the church from divers great errors into which she had fallen, and which else threatened her destruction. During the time of Savonarola's mission in Florence he had been one of his most zealous and fervent disciples; and so far from being daunted by the disastrous fate of his chief, and the dispersion of his sect, he came to Rome itself, and commenced the promulgation of similar doctrines. Fortunately, to save him from the consequences of this daring, it pleased Our Lady that at this time Donna Lucrezia, being oppressed with sorrow on account of her unhappy union with the Lord of Pesaro, went to him as to a saint on earth for advice and religious consolation. Shortly followed the divorce, and the appointment of Fra Bruno to the office of confessor, to the great wrath of half a dozen loftier pretendants.

Alfonso thought that there might have been as much policy as piety in this arrangement, for Biccocco unguardedly acknowledged that the duties of his new office took up so much of his time that the friar discontinued his public arraignment of abuses. But he frequently attempted to resign it; and finding that his entreaties were disregarded, and upbraided in his conscience by his neglect of the duties of his call, he finally determined to withdraw himself from Rome, in secret, and he undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Biccocco accompanied him on this long and dangerous voyage, the perils and sufferings of which he related at great length, perpetually eulogizing his master's patience and saint-like indifference to every toil and hazard. They wandered a long time in Syria and Palestine, making many proselytes, and comforting the little congregations of Christians scattered over those infidel countries. In the course of these perambulations again the Dominican received a call back to his neglected work of reformation, and hurried back to Italy, arriving in Rome amidst the rejoicings which celebrated the marriage of Donna Lucrezia with her second husband, the Prince of Salerno. The catastrophe, however, which

so shortly followed turned all her thoughts again to devotion, and much to the annoyance of the Dominican she sought him out personally to entreat him to resume his office. Biccocco was present at the scene, and he minutely detailed his master's steady refusals and the urgent supplications of his penitent; but what principally struck Alfonso was, that the ascetic reproached her with her marriage as with a crime on which the vengeance of Heaven had fallen. But finally his obstinacy was overcome by the submission and entreaties of the lady; but he had not desisted from his labours, and the number of his disciples was daily increasing. Among these Alfonso found that something extraordinary was expected to happen on the following day, when the Penitentiary was to preach before the jubilants in St. Peter, an honour which was obtained for him by Lucrezia. But it was not doubt d that he would take the opportunity, at whatever risk, to promulgate his reforming doctrines before the assemblage of the Christian world.

Time were away in this long discourse, and it was with a start that the friar heard the remote bell of a monastery toll midnight. He apologized to Alfonso for keeping him so long awake when he was doubtless weary and desired to rest. " 'Tis the better fault of two," replied the Hospitaller. " But methinks I should not have been less inclined to sleep if I had been at conversation with Apollo and all the muses."

Fra Biccocco laughed jollily at this compliment, and busied himself with renewed zeal in arranging the rushes which were to receive the honour of the guest's presence. When this was performed to his satisfaction, he was about to betake himself in peace to his own heap, when Alfonso reminded him of the lamp which his superior had desired him to renew. The friar thanked him heartily, rinsed his mouth of the fume of the wine, and taking a jar of oil, disappeared with a somewhat wavering step.

He returned in a few minutes. " If ever mortal saint were lifted up in the air by intense devotion, my beloved master is now," he exclaimed. " He heard me no more than if I had been a ghost, though I had the misfortune to stumble and spill a good deal of oil, not to mention the sputtering of the flame as I poured it into his lamp. Oh, benedicite!—were it not for h s sanctity being over us, I should no more dare to close mine eyes under these mountains of ruin than an owl in the Corso on a feast day."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE JUBILEE.

" Unless to Peter's chair the viewless wind
Must come and ask permission when to blow,
What further empire would it have? for now
A ghostly Domination, unconfined
As that by dreaming Bards to Love assigned,
Sits there in sober truth."—WORDSWORTH.

The morning of the Jubilee dawned;—and it was the distant roar and merriment of cannon and bells announcing the dawn of the great day which startled the Hospitaller from a profound but dream-haunted sleep.

The first object he beheld was his kindly host, Biccocco, who was boiling milk, and at the same time grilling a fowl split in halves over the

fire. Alfonso could scarcely forbear laughing at the profound gravity with which he performed this operation, as if it was the most important in which man could be engaged. Observing him stir, the friar looked round, and informed him that Fra Bruno had already gone to join the procession of his order, leaving word that the knight should not be disturbed. Alfonso uttered some words of moody thanks, and while Biccocco put the breakfast in more active preparation, he sallied forth from the ruins to bathe in the lucid stream which flows near them. As he went he was struck with the change which daylight produced on those extraordinary remains, so dismal and funereal by night. Millions of flowers of the most beautiful colours bloomed in every crevice in the deserted chambers, on the summits of the aerial arches, around the fallen columns, and filled the air with fresh and dewy perfumes. Birds of sweet note sung on every bough; the dark cypresses became pyramids of verdure shooting into the silvery sky; the slopes of the hills on each side seemed no longer desolate; their ruins inhabited them.

Discontented with himself and all things, still the balmy freshness of the sweet air somewhat soothed Alfonso's irritation; and when he returned to breakfast with Biccocco he had regained calm enough to observe the agitation of the poor monk. To his inquiries into the cause for some time Biccocco returned evasive replies, but at last he confessed that he apprehended his master would make some great outbreak of holy indignation, which would bring his friends into trouble, despite the potent favour of Donna Lucrezia. He had gone out fasting, announcing as much to his faithful attendant, by advising him not to be of his company on that day. But Biccocco declared, with tears bubbling over his jolly eyes, that he had no doubt a visible miracle would be performed in his superior's behalf, if he incurred danger, and therefore he should hasten to join him as soon as breakfast was despatched.

A thought beamed in upon Alfonso that it was his knowledge of the dangerous designs of the Penitentiary, in a political sense, which had incited Cæsar to the attempt on his life. And if Fra Bruno really intended to enter into an open war with the papal court, was it not certain that he could have no motive of jealousy to actuate his revelation of the previous night? So important had the solution of this point become to Alfonso, that, but that he remembered his compact with the young Jewess, he would have accompanied Biccocco. But feigning some excuse, he parted with him where the road to the Forum branched off, the good monk bestowing on him his benediction, and a branch of consecrated palm.

It was, however, with great doubt that Miriam would or could keep her appointment that the Hospitaller made his way to the Forum in which he had agreed to meet her. It was not probable that her memory, which confounded impressions so much more vivid, would retain one so evanescent. Moreover, now that he imagined he had attained the certainty of Lucrezia's guilt, the rest seemed merely matter of idle curiosity. And when he arrived in the Forum, or Ox-Market as it had come to be called, the prodigious multitudes which already began to swarm—multitudes of every land and costume,—among whom the Romans themselves by their paucity seemed to be the foreigners,—he began almost to wish that she might have forgotten the plight.

He took his station for some time on a conspicuous point—a sort of mound of accumulated ruins and rubbish, on which were three solitary columns, supporting a broken capital. A gorgeous dream of the magni-

fidence of ancient Rome, conjured up even by the ruins around, for a time diverted his darker visions. The broad space was bounded by the towers of the Capitol on one hand, on another by the distant majesty of the Colosseum, showing its massive ruins far above the tallest trees ; the Palatine lay before him covered with the stupendous remains of the palaces of the Cæsars, temples and arches crowning every steep, and hiding their decay in the golden mists which were but just rising under the glow of day ; and the diversified masses of the passing crowds banished the sense of silence and desolation, usually so oppressive when it is that left by the departure, not the mere absence of man.

But in vain did the Hospitaller await his damsel with a lover's impatience ; and still more vainly did he mingle with the festal throngs in search of her. The hopelessness of his expectations at last occurred to him so strongly, as time wore on, that he resolved to go to the Ghetto, and under pretence of purchasing some drugs, (for he recollects that the house belonged to an apothecary,) ascertain if there was any possibility of reminding Miriam of her promise.

He hastened, therefore, to the Ghetto ; but on reaching the first gate, he learned that no Christian was to be allowed to enter, nor Jew to leave it, during the whole week of the Jubilee, with the exception of those who, according to custom, were to run a foot-race to divert the populace —an indignity which is now commuted into paying the expenses of one of horses, which takes place annually during the carnival.

The knight's anxiety for the safety of Miriam returned, and it was with some vague intention of venturing into the Ghetto by the strange means he had left it on the previous night, that he strayed down the Marsh to the archway of the stream. To his surprise he found the waters rushing out in such volume that they filled the archway, and rendered any attempt at entering by it impossible. This circumstance made him suspect that the Hebrews had discovered his visit, and increased his anxiety, while it deprived him of all means of satisfying it.

Much time had been wasted in these researches ; and fearing lest he should be too late to witness the opening splendours and portents of the Jubilee, Alfonso joined the masses which were now sweeping towards the Vatican.

It was in the antique cathedral of Constantine that the grand mass of the Jubilee was to be celebrated ; but vast as was its extent, only a part of the pilgrims could be contained, and the gates were thrown open to allow the great multitude which filled the square of St. Peter to share the benefits, and some of the glories of the spectacle. His great strength and religious attire enabled the Hospitaller to cross these masses, and to enter the basilica. The interior presented a scene of extraordinary magnificence, for the wealth and ostentation of the Borgias made this last jubilee of Christian unity the most gorgeous—like the glories around the setting sun.

The cathedral, crumbling under the weight of twelve centuries, its, ruinous fissures concealed by hangings of precious woofs, in a manner typified the faith of which it was the arena. But unbounded was the reverence with which it was regarded by all Christendom, for it was still supported on pillars whose foundations the first Christian emperor had laid, and beneath its pavement reposed the ashes of the glorified founder of the papacy, of the saint who had seen and conversed with the divinity in human form.

A brilliant sun illuminated the vast area of the pile, and revealed its

extent by lighting up innumerable remote altars, all glistening with gold plate, emblazoned canopies, jewelled shrines, and the most valued reliques of various saints and founders of orders, each attended by its deputation, often from distant countries, set forth with every decoration of gold and precious stones which could evince their own veneration, and win the gaze of the people. But the grand altar, in the centre of the middle aisle, attracted all attention. It was raised upon a circular platform, carpeted with cloth-of-gold, and, to believe the whispers that circulated, was itself of the same ore, most skilfully ornamented with precious stones, which blazed forth the name of Jesus, and various personifications of Christianity. It was canopied by a pavilion of cloth-of-gold still more lustrously gemmed, beneath which was the tabernacle of the Host, on which indeed every dazzling power of the goldsmith's and jeweller's art had been exhausted, and which blazed like a noonday sun.

The principal pomp of the spectacle was yet wanting, the pontiff and his court being still in the Vatican, receiving the congratulations of the jubilants, and their homage. But while surveying the preparations, Alfonso found that he was himself an object of notice; a page who had been listlessly wandering about, no sooner saw him than he darted forward, and respectfully inquired if his name was the Lord Alfonso of Ravenna, that which the prince had assumed to misdirect curiosity from his own. He replied in the affirmative, but before he could demand the page's reason for his inquiry, he had bounded away, as if in great satisfaction. In a few minutes after the knight beheld Burchard advancing towards him.

"The most holy father commands you to his presence, sir knight," he said briefly. "Follow me."

Waving his silver wand with great dignity he passed on, and never doubting but that the cavalier would follow him on wings, looked not back until he had almost reached a door which opened into the Vatican. But hearing no sound of voice or footfall he turned his head, and perceived that the knight still stood as if rooted to the ground. Imagining that he had not perceived that he spoke to him, the dean beckoned to him authoritatively; and the hesitation of the instant passed, Alfonso obeyed.

The grandeur of the Borgian taste, and the dawn of a new age which was to unite all the glories of the arts, were visible at every step through the palace which Alfonso traversed. But he was scarcely surprised with the magnificence he beheld, until arriving at a line of gilded porphyry pillars which descended by a flight of marble stairs to the vast hall in which Alexander sat enthroned, he commanded a view of a spectacle so extraordinarily superb, that it was with difficulty he prevented himself from uttering an exclamation. A continual procession of jubilants, lay and clerical, in gorgeous costumes, were passing before the pontiff's throne, kissing his feet in homage, and offering their congratulations, and then joining the magnificent crowd which was stationary behind the throne. Even as the Hospitaller entered he remarked an unwont and, truth to say, scandalous spectacle in an ecclesiastical court. Lucrezia, attended by a retinue of young and beautiful ladies, was at the moment kneeling before the pontiff, to receive his benediction; and whether in bravery, or refutation of opinion, he raised her in his arms, and kissed her with extreme tenderness. Burchard gave a deep sigh, though probably because the presence of a female at all was out of all precedent; and Lucrezia, turning to take a place which seemed assigned to her on the right of the throne, suddenly encountered the eyes of Don Alfonso. She

started, and a scarlet tint instantly overspread her blooming complexion, succeeded by waxen paleness; and Alfonso advanced without again raising his eyes.

It was not without strong inner emotion that he approached the throne under the gaze of so many eyes, which seemed all fixed on him as on an object of great curiosity. But as he came, Lucrezia recovered her self-possession; her beauty lit up with an expression of sparkling joy and welcome, its roseate hues all deepened, and her sweet eyes were aglow with an emotion which, in spite of all her efforts, wet their long lashes with tears. The warm and melting nature of the south predominated over every habit of female dissimulation; and it was with the most undisguised and rapturous delight, that as the knight knelt at the foot of the pontifical throne, she exclaimed—"He is here! Holy father! if my life be of any value, behold the matchless chevalier to whom I owe it!"

"Oscula pedes beatos beatissimi Patris!" whispered Burchard to Don Alfonso, who mechanically obeyed by mounting the steps of the throne, and kneeling at the pontiff's feet, which he kissed.

"Rise and let us embrace you, valiant Cid! for Ruy Diaz el Campeador hath few achievements in his chronicle which surpass thine of the buffalo," said Alexander, placing his jewelled hands on the warrior's shoulders. "Moreover, we owe thee it seems a share in our good son, Paolo's redemption! Therefore, name what recompense thou wilt that is in our power to grant, and Christendom shall see if we are not as grateful for services as resentful of evil entreatment!"

"Holy father! men are neither rewarded nor punished for the accidents of which they are unwitting agents, good or bad," replied Alfonso, with a stern gravity which obviously surprised all within hearing, for even this warmth of gratitude struck him in an evil light. "Wherefore the only recompense which I demand is to have none imputed to me in this matter—for, indeed, the atoms of Epicurus came not together more fortuitously than my steed and lance between the magnificent lady, your holiness's niece, and the enraged bull at Nepi."

"But I aspire to owe you gratitude, knight, for a favour which valour, not chance, must bestow," said Lucrezia, blushing still more exquisitely beautiful as she stepped towards Alfonso, and taking a silvery scarf from her neck, threw it lightly over his shoulders. "In the approaching tournament, that I may assure myself of the prize, noble Hospitaller, I name you my knight."

Alfonso's heart throbbed, and his cheek flushed, and he was probably about to give way to a mastering impulse; but, at the moment, his eye encountered a pair fixed upon him in the cowl of a monk with a glare like that of some wild animal in a cave. He recognized Fra Bruno, and the sudden tide of recollections came into concussion with the feeling, and strong as it was, repelled it.

"August lady!" he replied, drawing off the scarf, which clung to the rivets of his armour; "as you may well perceive, it is not permitted me to contend for the smiles of earthly beauty. But to win the crown for the shrine of Our Lady of Purity in Ferrara I will venture me as far as may be;—whereby all women shall owe me thanks, that show thereby how infinitely I esteem the celestial chastity and modesty of which Our Lady is exemplar, and which are the supreme ornaments of their sex; without which, indeed, I hold all beauty as a lure of Satan, poison in a golden vase, rottenness swathed in cloth of gold!" And, as he spoke, finding

that the scarf was still caught in his armour, he clutched it away so impatiently that he tore it into several strips.

Those who beheld the countenance of Lucrezia Borgia as the Hospitaller spoke could scarcely follow, even in thought, the rapid alternation of emotions which troubled its beauty. But after the instant's pause of astonishment which held the whole presence, an expression of pride and defiance subdued that of extreme shame and anguish. Her rosy mouth shone with a smile of scorn, her eyes lightened, her cheeks crimsoned, and snatching the scarf which the knight presented on his knee, she turned to the surrounding nobles.

"Ladies were not wont to be thus denied, in the days of Carlo Magno or of King Arthur, Messer Bembo!" she said, observing the canon. "How did Boiardo learn his fair tales of love and courtesy in Ferrara? But if they be not forgotten legends over all Italy, I trust I shall find some knight who will essay to win the prize for me—were I even the reverse of our blessed Lady of Purity—whose knight we cannot own this holy warrior to be, until she hath avowed him by giving his lance the victory."

"The gentleman is from Ferrara, lady, 'tis true," replied Bembo, half smiling and yet very much confused. "But your grace should be informed that 'tis a Ferrarese proverb that he who may not eat the peach should not smell at it—and the Knights of St. John are but monks in steel."

"Deign to bestow this precious silk on me, lady!" said Paolo Orsino, kneeling, and kissing it with passionate enthusiasm. "And in a gentle and loving pass of arms I hope to convince this gentleman, my friend, that the prize of earthly beauty should go where the consent of mankind would place it, not where only angels should pretend to challenge its setting."

"In you, Signor Paolo, this were an enforced devor. I will name none my knight but he who brings me the crown," said the lady, biting her bright lip. "But, Knight of England! I would fain count your lance among my hopes?"

Starting from an attitude of gloom in which he had been listening, Sir Reginald's face beamed over with joy; and kneeling, he swore so vehemently by St. George that he would strive to win her the wreath as long as he could sit in saddle or couch spear, that Lucrezia smiled upon him with a tenderness which heightened his enthusiasm almost to rapture, and infused a new feeling into Don Alfonso's breast. Innumerable voices now declared the same intention.

"Nay, but let us not deprive some worthier lady of her champion," said Lucrezia, glancing with a mixture of triumph and sadness around. "We know not why indeed Our Lady of Purity should be thus as it were set in contest and contrast with us; but that none of you may fear her aidance against us, if the wreath be mine I will win it only as an offering to the shrine of Our Lady of the Jubilee, to whom we mean to dedicate a chapel on the spot where we escaped—by *chance*—from a buffalo."

"Ay, 'tis not so easy to win the crown of a tournament as to frighten a bullock," said Cæsar, marking with satisfaction the gloom on his sire's brow. "But your paternity may remember that time presses."

"Knight, thou art not half, but wholly a monk!" exclaimed Alexander, with evident displeasure. "At thy years it had been easier for me to have won ten tournaments, than to have refused one such request from a dame so beautiful!" And he glanced with pride and affection on his fair daughter, darkening when he marked her emotion. He then nodded impatiently to the master of the ceremonies, who, with his wand, motioned

to the Hospitaller to pass behind the throne, and to those beyond to continue their homage.

The stupendous form of Vitellozzo now appeared, and the clash of his armour, as he knelt, rang through the hall.

“The lord of Città di Castello!” exclaimed the pontiff with evident astonishment, and withdrawing his foot as if he meant to spurn the giant with it.

“In all humility and devotion, here, to kiss the blessed feet,” said Vitellozzo, in a tone in which awe struggled with habitual hardihood.

“This is too insolent, Lords Orsini, if it is ye have brought this man to mock us with his homage before a throne from which he threatened to thrust us!” exclaimed Alexander, turning with vehemence to those nobles.

“Nay, holy father, it was at my entreaty and advice, since we are all to be brothers henceforth,” replied the Duke of Romagna, with his tart smile.

“Holy father! I pray you but to show me what I must do to win your pardon?” said Vitellozzo, whom his ingrained superstition, which was part and parcel of his very rebelliousnes, and the silence of the Orsini, much discomfited.

“Disband thy German thieves—and let thy vassals learn there are other duties for Christian men than obeying the licentious commands of their lord against his own,” returned Alexander passionately, and rising from his seat, while Vitellozzo also rose with a low hoarse laugh from his knees, and retreated sullenly among the Orsini.

The duke glanced sorrowfully at Paolo Orsino as his irritated sire resumed his seat, with an angry frown at the whole group, and the ceremonial proceeded, hastened by the visible impatience of the pontiff—was at length concluded, and then the whole court was marshalled in procession to proceed to St. Peter’s.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SERMON OF THE JUBILEE.

Prometheus.—“Venerable mother!
All else who live and suffer take from thee
Some comfort; flowers, and fruits, and happy sounds,
And love, though fleeting; these may not be mine,
But mine own words, I pray, deny me not.”—SHELLEY.

Unwilling to share the observation which would attend those who followed in the procession, Alfonso glided out of the palace into the temple, and took up a remote station at a shrine in one of the cross aisles. The tolling of unnumbered bells and the thunder of artillery soon announced the approach of the papal procession; but some time before it appeared a gorgeous chaunt was remotely audible, mingling in that of the cathedral choirs with a sweet and melancholy effect, as if the heavens had opened, and the distant harmony descended from angelic voices. At the point where he stood the procession appeared to Alfonso one moving mass of glitter and sumptuous colour, as the sun streamed down upon it along the cross-aisle which it traversed. The rich copes of the ecclesiastics, stiff with gold and gorgeous brocade, the jewelled mantles of the nobles, the polished breastplates and tasselled spears of the guard, passed in a con-

fusion of splendour. But Alfonso easily recognized the pontiff, borne in his gilded chair, under a superb canopy, surrounded by a crowd of bishops, his episcopal cope and tiara glittering all over with jewels, and extending his hands in benediction as he advanced to the kneeling myriads.

An infinite array of officials followed ; and then came the pilgrims of the highest rank, each nation marching in separate masses, in the most sumptuous and various costumes. Then followed an endless procession of the different orders of monks and nuns, the former carrying torches, the latter lighted tapers, albeit the sun flamed down the aisles in blazing cataracts. After these fraternities and sisterhoods came Lucrezia with her court, Caesar, his wife, and their retinue. Alfonso discerned that Lucrezia walked between the Orsino and Le Beaufort, and for the first time he noticed the peculiar magnificence of the latter's garb. It is true that the handsome English knight had always been conspicuous for the pomp of his garniture, but on this occasion he surpassed himself. Even the Orsino, whose taste was naturally to sombre colours, was now arrayed like a kingly bridegroom, had he looked the character more cheerfully.

Caesar was habited in red satin and gold brocade, powdered all over with large diamonds and pearls : his ducal cap was encircled with three rows of jewels, conspicuous among which were seven rubies, "of the bigness of large beans," as a cotemporary record declares. His breast glittered like the shield of the magician Atlante, with so brilliant a lustre that it was scarcely possible to look at it more steadily than at the sun. Even his boots were of fretted gold-work, and the spurs shone on the pavement with the sparkles of gems. His magnificent mantle, which it was noted was of imperial purple lined with ermine, and borne by ten barons of high rank, a gorgeous sword, and the insignia of many illustrious orders of knighthood, completed his splendour.

After this blaze all that followed seemed poor, although the immense procession continued to pass as glorious as rich stuffs and banners and jewels and pomp of bearing could make them ; or the darkening of the knight's fancies, and the clouds of incense which arose, made it appear to him as if the dun of evening had suddenly fallen over all that coloured magnificence which had set the air alight as it went. Nevertheless he joined in the line of the procession, when he considered it sufficiently remote from the chief personages, and was drifted by chance, and almost against his will, to a station opposite to Lucrezia's.

And now arose the ocean-like chaunt of measured and harmonious voices ; and the pontiff, descending from his throne, proceeded to officiate as high-priest in the august solemnity. Come with what prejudices men might, it was not in humanity to resist the impressions of overwhelming awe produced by the magnificence of the spectacle, and the sublime recollections with which the solemnity in every stage was associated. The majestic person, and great but unbent age of Alexander, when not contradicted by the fire and impatience of his eye and occasional gesture, supported all the venerableness and dignity of a Pontifex Maximus ; and when at the conclusion of the mass he bestowed his benediction on all Christendom, the Knight of St. John was kneeling with the immense masses—perhaps as well convinced as the most enthusiastic pilgrim there, that he was receiving a blessing direct from heaven.

The paroxysm only subsided when, raising his head, Alfonso beheld Fra Bruno, attended by a number of Dominicans of his order, mount a richly

carved pulpit fixed in one of the immense pillars. He carried with him a parchment sealed with lead, supposed to be the Bull of Indulgences, which was impatiently expected by the pilgrims.

Throwing back his cowl, the severe Spanish features of the friar were seen, pale but composed, like one brought forth to suffer some terrific punishment, but who despised its terrors. There was a short silence, during which the Romans communicated the name and reputation of the Penitentiary to their foreign guests. Gazing at him, Alfonso felt assured that no failure in his courage need be anticipated; and he mused with bitter satisfaction on the astonishment and discomfiture which the papal court was about to sustain. Fra Bruno, however, did not read the bull, seeming to reserve it for a *bonne bouche* after the harangue which he was to pronounce.

The sermon was delivered in Latin, which was still the common language of Europe; and it was such as for some time amply answered Alfonso's expectations. The preacher began with a truly terrific picture of the state of society and religion throughout the Christian world, which he delineated with such Dantesque gloom and horror, that but for his arabesque entanglement and gorgeousness of imagery it might have been thought that the poet of hell had returned to describe earth in colours taken from its murkiest depths. But with all the fantastic convolutions of his reasoning the fervour of a real eloquence began to overflow the twisted fountains in which the scholastic rhetoric of the day usually confined its displays. These qualities Fra Bruno specially exhibited when, describing the dawn of the pure light of Christianity in which the gods of paganism vanished like phantoms, he declared that they were once more deified on earth, and the light all but extinguished. Treating the antique divinities as personifications of human passions and lusts, his eloquence took the most various and terrible tints, and considering the nature of some of the crimes which he thus delineated and anathematized, many began to perceive personal applications of a hideous nature. None more than the Hospitaller.

After this exordium the ascetic friar drew a contrast of the state which he declared would be the fulfilment of the ideal of Christianity, and the dreams of stoic or Spartan legislator never presented a sterner vision of human duties and existence. It seemed as if his words, like the lava overflow of a volcano, withered all that was green and flowery in their way. The universe, in his desponding eloquence, seemed but a vast desolation—space itself the destined arena of immeasurable sadness;—all the beautiful illusions which the magic of the passions hordes forth withered beneath his touch into the phantoms which perhaps they are. The vanity of hope, the hollowness of success, the bitterness which mingle in the most resplendent draughts of glory, and love, and triumph—he painted in powerful colours, to contrast with the marble calm of that form of stoicism which he called religion. Thence he passed into a still more terrific delineation of the morals and manners of the clergy.

The astonishment and even fear of the great assembly every moment increased. But as the attack dealt only as yet in generalities, Alexander seemed to listen to it even with satisfaction. A singularity remarked in the character of this pontiff by all his historians, and which by some has been considered as proof of a nature not originally evil, was his love of virtue in the abstract. He himself was frequent in resolutions and recommendations to reformation, which his violent passions, ambition, and

perhaps the necessities of his dangerous supremacy, had always frustrated.

The duke listened to *Fra Bruno*'s declamation with a livid satirical smile, as if it diverted him, and occasionally he pointed the invectives of the friar by nodding at those who were supposed to be guilty of the crimes alleged, as if to call upon them to notice that they were assailed.

Some terrible climax to this extraordinary harangue seemed in preparation. *Fra Bruno* himself paused like one collecting all his energies for a dreadful feat. It was at this moment that rolling his eyes around the assembly, as if to gather all their attention—his glance fell upon *Donna Lucrezia*. She was gazing at the Hospitaller in such absorption, that she seemed not even to observe the silence.

The words which *Fra Bruno* had begun to form died away on his lips, his large chest heaved with a convulsive breathing,—and again he was silent. *Lucrezia* started as if awaking from a dream, and she glanced up at the friar in astonishment. He began to speak once more, but it was in an altered, wandering tone, which for some time had little or no connexion with his subject, nor was it perceptible by what means he introduced a very different topic—his own preservation on the previous night. Something he spoke in general about the Jubilee—about mercy—and then of this signal one granted to himself; and he related minutely his escape from the designs of certain masked assassins. The Hospitaller heard, with astonishment at the imprudent gratitude of the monk, the commendations which he lavishly bestowed upon him; and almost feared that he would divulge his suspicions of the instigators of the crime.

Lucrezia could not suppress her tears, and a general murmur of applause arose, despite the sacredness of the time and place; when it subsided, *Fra Bruno* was audible, continuing his narrative with increased vehemence, bordering on wildness. But far from imputing the attempt to its real planner, it almost seemed that he hinted at the *Orsini*, in declaring that from the discourse of the assassins it appeared that their wrath was excited against him by his known disapprobation of an alliance projected by two mighty houses. In defiance of this frenzied revenge, *Fra Bruno* solemnly announced, that he continued in the belief and declaration that, after the two tremendous judgments in which heaven itself had condemned the hopes of nuptial happiness, in one of the contracting parties, further to tempt its wrath were to bring down the lightning directly on the heads of the offenders! No reason for this opinion did he give beyond the prophetic and oracular tone in which he uttered it, and which was distinctly heard amidst all the mutter which arose throughout the basilica.

Various was the effect of this extraordinary announcement. The pontiff glanced wrathfully and suspiciously at *Caesar*, who sat smiling, as if he imagined this was his work; the Duke of Gravina started up, and laid his hand on his dagger, tossing his grey hair from his flashing eyes, but *Paolo* drew him back, and in a whisper implored him not thus to point the insinuation of the bribed and malignant confessor. *Lucrezia*, however, made no effort to conceal her confusion, but covered her face with both hands; while the Hospitaller's imagination filled up the dark void which the monk's silence left, on the reasons which induced him to anathematize an union with a wretch so guilty.

Gliding dexterously from his dangerous subject, *Fra Bruno* pronounced a public forgiveness of his enemies, for,—remembering no longer his first terrible analysis of religion,—he declared that its essence was love. And

now, indeed, did the extraordinary friar become eloquent!—it was amazing with what unnatural but surpassing ingenuity he transferred the attributes of an intellectual operation into those of a sensual passion—religion into love—with the fervid alchemy of his Spanish imagination. So warmly eloquent waxed his discourse, that the voluptuous glow returned to Lucrezia's complexion, and a deeper chill to Alfonso's; but it was remarkable that, even in one of his most splendid flights, Fra Bruno abruptly checked himself—and with a deep groan he snatched up the Bull, tore off its leaden seal, and read it in a strangely altered, loud, and discordant voice.

A few moments of devout silence followed, and the Penitentiary was expected to kneel and utter a prayer of thanksgiving. But he stood motionless; and after waiting for some short time, Alexander coldly observed to some attendants, “Go and see what ails the disciple of Savonarola—and we will say the *Gratias* ourself!” and rising, he returned to the altar, with the accustomed retinue of cardinals and prelates, and chaunted the thanksgiving with a voice of the harmonious volume and power of an organ-pipe. At the conclusion the Duke of Romagna approached the altar, alone, demanded permission to make his duteous offering, and, instead of gold, emptied a casket of precious gems on the platform.

“ ‘Tis a most princely and regal benefaction!” exclaimed the Datary, in delight. “A most illustrious exemplar!”

“Charlemagne gave more!—but when I come like him to receive the crown of the West, so will I!” replied the duke, smiling, amidst a general stare of amazement. But the example was immediately followed, and in a few minutes the altar was heaped around with present of extraordinary magnificence and value—offerings from nearly all the sovereigns, states, nobles, great cities, and commonalties of Europe. Sacks of gold and silver were emptied out, jewels, crucifixes, reliques, necklaces, cloths of gold, rich embroideries, tapestries, amber, pearls, strange productions of the newly discovered world, gold-dust, ivory, rare spices, all the most precious commodities of the remote lands from which the pilgrims came, in return for which each received a branch of consecrated palm from the hands of the Datary, whose keen eyes glistened almost as brightly as the treasures whose receipt he thus acknowledged.

Meanwhile drums beat, trumpets sounded, and the guards discharged their pieces in the square outside, answered by remote peals of ordnance, while within the basilica the organs of the various chapels poured down the aisles torrents of melody which joined into one mighty flow, and the vast multitude within and without joined the ecclesiastics in the magnificent notes of a *Gloria in Excelsis*. Alfonso's gaze was still, however, attracted towards the Dominican's pulpit, from which he beheld him descend, pale, dazzled, and staggering, as if under the influence of a sunstroke, and leaning on the shoulder of Biccocco. But at this moment a terrific event turned away the Hospitaller's attention, and absorbed it. The great bell of the basilica was tolling to celebrate the Jubilee, and the agitation of the air produced by so many sounds shook the vast and ruinous piles so violently, that a prodigious mass of iron, which formed one of the clappers of the bell, fell from the belfry in its skyey spire, and dashing with irresistible weight through every obstruction, reached the ground at the very feet of the pontiff, crushing a deep hole in the pavement, and throwing a million pieces of shattered marble over himself and his attendants.

The vast assemblage was for a moment motionless with terror and surprise, expecting universal destruction, for nothing less than the downfall of the whole basilica, with all its ponderous masses of marble on their heads, was expected. A cry arose that the pope was killed, which was echoed in a million different tones according as men's fears or hopes predominated; and the commotion which arose gave a lively idea of what might have followed the fall of the tower of Babel. But even in the first moment of the panic, when it was doubtful whether the whole centre of the basilica was not crumbling down, Lucrezia, with a shriek which rang to its summit, had rushed from the comparative safety of her own position—and when Alfonso opened his eyes, or rather saw again, after the momentary blindness of the shock, he beheld her folded in her father's arms. And if indeed Alexander was the monster which his enemies represented him, never was the might of opinion more remarkably displayed than at that moment, since it could even impose upon himself in a conjuncture of such terror and deadly suspense; for, as if he were indeed the acceptable vicar of Christ, and high priest of the Eternal, suffering Lucrezia to sink in her exhaustion at his feet, and raising his clasped hands with the majesty of a prophet interposing between the offended heavens and the earth, he uttered a *De Profundis*, with vehement fervour, amid profound silence, the multitude seeming stilled from its panic, which might have been attended with far more deadly consequences than the accident, as if by a spell. There was then a solemn pause—no stone stirred—and a sea-like response of Amen, and an universal sigh of relief which sounded like a forest rising when the wind has passed over it, marked the restoration of confidence.

With a smile of unutterable tenderness, and gently chiding her terrors, Alexander then raised his weeping and half-distracted daughter, who covered both his hands with her kisses and tears. Alfonso thought he beheld a few stern drops from the pontiff's eyes mingle with this feminine overflow; and while the duke, with a crowd of the devotees, rushed round Alexander with congratulations and inquiries, the voice of the Hospitaller was heard above all,—"The summits of St. Peter yet stand!—but if they be not speedily repaired and rebuilt, the whole mass will fall into ruin; even so, pilgrims of the world, will it befall with Christianity!"

"Whoever speaks, says well!—and it were a noble work of piety in the faithful to contribute each his might or his mite towards so great a work!" said Cæsar, whose ambition took the form of the most rapturous filial joy at his sire's preservation. "But meanwhile, holy father, comfort the hearts of the myriads outside with your presence, lest evil men misdirect their grief and despair!"

"We will to Santa Maria in solemn procession.—Monsignor Ferrara bring with us three hundred gold crowns in the rare chalice presented us by the Hanseatic, in offering to my guardian saint, our Lady of that church!" said Alexander somewhat faintly, adding, "We have great warnings granted us!" and the pontiff drew an ivory reliquary from his bosom, in which it was said that he always carried the Host, which he kissed with great devotion. "Courage, our Lucrezia!—Orsino, lend your support—the elm and the vine, in school comparison! Let us away to Santa Maria Maggiore!"

The immediate attendants of the pontiff had now assembled and brought his chair of state; but he refused to mount it, and desiring all present to follow him to the church he had himself named, to return thanks to the

Holy Virgin for his preservation, he headed the procession with Lucrezia, the duke, and a confused multitude of cardinals and courtiers. Burciardo gave one look of utter despair over the masses as they crowded out of the basilica, and apparently abandoned all hope of restoring its order.

Soon were audible the deafening shouts of gratulation which resounded over the Piazza, as the pontifical procession poured out; but Alfonso made no attempt to follow. In an incredibly short time the whole basilica seemed emptied—while he gazed with a degree of vacancy after the vanishing masses, more gorgeous in their broken and mingled pomp than when in marshalled order, as they passed out of the great portal of the church, lit by the powerful sun. Alfonso stood lost in a confused reverie, for there was not one of his doubts but was deepened by the scene he had witnessed. The wild devotion of Lucrezia to her father—that father's unmoved majesty in so awful a conjuncture—the monk's audacity in proclaiming the abuses of the papacy, his dastardly imputation of the attempt on the Orsini, if the drift of his suspicions had not been misunderstood by Alfonso,—his seeming absence of any feeling of jealousy in the splendid eulogiums he had heaped on a cavalier already so much favoured by Lucrezia! But it occurred to Alfonso that these praises might have been uttered to expose him to the vengeance of the Duke of Romagna; and while musing on this sujet, he suddenly discerned the friar, attended by Biccocco, who stood gazing as it were incredulously at the shattered altar pavement and the mass of iron deeply embedded in it. He advanced hastily towards him, but as he approached he was struck by observing the Dominican raise his eyes, sparkling with mad fury, to the sunshine, and clench his hands as if in defiance of its glory. Yet when he reached the spot, he seemed calm, and awaited his approach with perfect composure.

"You hold your life indeed rather as a wrong than as a benefit, monk, since it is thus that you repay its defence!" exclaimed Alfonso, somewhat staggered by the unmoved countenance of the Dominican.

"If I have done thee any temporal injury, be comforted, for thou hast wrought me an eternal one!" replied Bruno, with a profound sigh.

"I, Dominieau!" exclaimed Alfonso, almost concluding at the moment that the Penitentiary was out of his senses.

"Even thou!—the struggle of the dark and bright angel were over in my soul, when thou didst come to renew it!" said Fra Bruno, in a tone of exceeding bitterness. "And yet again I had strung my soul to its mighty task—I beheld you again—and I shrank from it, a second and more cowardly Judas!"

"Shrunk, brother! when you lashed them till their souls must have more weals in them than the windy sea!" said Biccocco, wonderingly.

"My commission was to call upon the whole Christian world, herein assembled, to form themselves into a general council, and eject from a chair which he had obtained by simony, with the aid of the devil, Roderie Borgia, commonly called Pope Alexander VI.," said the monk, furiously. "Which simony has rendered all his acts and deeds null, and rolls back upon himself and the fiend who supports him all the scandal and infamy which the deeds of the pretended vicar of Christ throw upon Christianity itself!"

"Take your superior out of the temple; he is mad and blasphemous!" said the Hospitaller, appalled at this wild outburst.

"Else that the church should anon be rent in twain, and form a chasm down which countless generations shall fall into the abyss!" continued the monk, rapidly, and then quashing his teeth as if the remembrance of his failure rushed upon him.

"If he would but have taken a morsel of the grilled fowl, or a bite of wheaten bread!—but he has been a-hungering these four-and-thirty hours!" said Biccocco, also staring aghast.

"I am not hungry—I feel no corporeal pang—scorch me with fire, and I shall not feel it—and thus perchance my despair shall be too great even for the tortures of hell to give me the relief of anguish!" continued the monk. "But, Knight, thou owest me no vengeance—I have saved thee—I have made this city a place of terror for thee! Cæsar suspects thee—remain and thou art lost!—Or if it be true that I have wronged thee,—come when thou wilt—during all the season of the Jubilee—thou wilt find me a ruin amongst ruins, on Aventine!"

"Tell me only, monk, how could my presence throw obstacles in the way of thine intents?" said Alfonso, perceiving that Fra Bruno had turned to depart, and more doubtful than ever that his sanity was disturbed by maceration and religious melancholy.

"Biccocco has told you—I am very faint—lost—I know not what I say!" returned the Dominican, clutching his companion's shoulder as if about to fall. "Lead me to the open sunshine!—sunshine—darkness! darkness, nothing but darkness—and for ever!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Non con spiriti costretti tali incanti,
Né con osservazion di stelle fanno,
Ma con simulazion, menzogne, e frodi,
Legano i cor d' indissolubili nodi."—ARIOSTO.

Not with constrained fiends such charms are wrought,
Nor observation of the midnight stars,
But with deceit, and fraud, and lies, they make
Chains which the shackled spirit cannot break.

It was sunrise on the morning following the ominous opening of the jubilee of the fifteenth century. The young rays piercing at a grilled window in the castle of Sant'Angelo, lighted two persons engaged in conversation, and showed that the walls were hung with various instruments of torture, and even the ceiling was set with hooks and rings as if for the same purposes. One of the interlocutors was John of the Catacombs, looking bruised and ghastly in the morning light; the other was Don Migueloto, whose usually murky visage was now lit up with vexation like a blacksmith's rusty forge.

"Yea, we have missed our chance—but this cursed Ferrarese shall have a handful from our ill-luck—let but his highness hear your story," said Don Migueloto, who had been listening to the bravo's long detail. "And hark! I hear him, for all he comes on such soft wolf's paws!"

Almost as these words were uttered, Cæsar entered the chamber, wrapped in a long Spanish cloak, and with a plain hat slouched over his visage, so that he appeared to be scarcely above the rank of a common citizen. He was engaged in so profound a rumination, that at first he did

not notice the sinister form of the bravo, and when his eye lighted on him, he gave a start backward and drew some weapon from his breast.

“My lord!—it is honest John whom you desired to see!” exclaimed Migueloto. The bravo bent almost to his boots, or rather sandals, for they closely resembled the ancient Italian greaves.

“Cry you mercy, honest John!” said the duke, returning the bend with mock solemnity. “Who could have expected to meet with anything honest so early, and in such company! But you spoke in good time, Miguel, for my finger was on the spring of this toy, and if there had been a dozen of you, every man would have had his share of poisoned needles somewhere in the face—best in the eyes.”

And whether in warning, or to exhibit the ingenious toy to which he alluded to such excellent connoisseurs, he opened his hand, and displayed a round ball pierced all over with needle-holes. “But honest John,” he continued smilingly, “thou look’st for all the world as if thou hadst been crushed in a wine-press,—I swear thou art of as many tints as a vine-yard in October! Tell us how it all befell—and be honest now indeed, or—” and his eye glanced significantly over the instruments of torture. But John of the Catacombs needed no impelling force to detail his wrongs, of which he evidently cherished the most bitter recollection.

“Well!—thou hast failed, man; the best of us may fail, even with the devil’s own hand in it,” said Cæsar, thoughtfully, and not at all so excited against the meddling Hospitaller as the two friends anticipated.

“But, Signor, he has safely lodged your spy in the Orsini palace,” said Migueloto, intereedingly.

“Ay, but instead of a scratch, I hear your fellow struck at his neck as if it were to butch a calf,” returned the duke. “Yet the Orsini will put the stronger faith in him—a skin-wound might have been suspected. And now, honest John, art thou not very anxious and resolved to be avenged, instead of grateful, for all these pretty colours in which the knight has tricked you out?”

“Signor,—Fra Bruno is a most holy saint of God! I will not lift mine arm against him,” said the bravo, with zealous earnestness.

“Sayest thou so, Roman mobster?” returned Cæsar, hastily. “Nay, then, he is dangerous!—But after the doctrine he delivered yesterday on Lucrezia’s nuptials, I cannot spare him as yet to heaven!—The cat’s wauling vexes the ear, but it keeps the rats from our bacon, perchance. Fear not for him!—I spoke of this archangel of thine, who hath the sledge-hammer to his wrist.”

“Would your highness have light let him to brighten his vision in our matters?” said the bravo eagerly, and knitting his surly brows. “But whether’tis a job or not, I owe him a turn of mine own free good-will, which I will pay him ere many suns go down in Ronne!”

“It was therefore I summoned thee; for, hearken, honest John, I will not have one hair of his head plucked out but by him who means to die by some strange and marrow-piercing torture,” returned Cæsar suddenly; and his two attendants stared at one another in vacant astonishment. “Remember what I have said—keep thy tongue in thy teeth; double whatever has been promised him, captain, and let him go!”

Migueloto bowed submissively but still more surprisedly, and gave a signal to honest John, who followed him, staring and bending confusedly to the duke. When they had disappeared, Cæsar, with a slight smile at their puzzled visages, left the Chamber of Questions, as it was called,

and ascended by a narrow, unlighted staircase to a door which admitted him on the ramparts of the tower of Sant'Angelo.

Day had not long dawned, and the sky was flecked all over with little rosy clouds, the sun being still behind the remote hills of the Campagna. The tranquillity of night and the beauty of day were united in that lovely morning twilight. The bright and animating breeze which played over the extensive scene below, appeared to be the only thing awake throughout its piles of palaces—its woods, vineyards, ruins,—the desolate plains which stretched beyond the walls—the fortress and its neighbouring river.

Seated on a huge culverin in one of the embrasures, leaning on her arm as if lost in contemplation of the scene below, with Cæsar's bloodhounds asleep at her feet, was Donna Fiamma. The duke approached on tiptoe, yet not so lightly but that the hounds raised their heads; and recognizing him, couched contentedly down. Not so Fiamma, who remained immersed in thought until Cæsar, gallantly kneeling, pressed his lip to her hand.

Fiamma turned, and the profound sadness in her countenance sparkled up into brightness as she perceived her lover in his attitude of tenderness and humility.

“Thou seest, love,” said Cæsar as he embraced her with apparently rapturous delight, “thou seest—perverse and froward as thou art! how early I can leave the bride thou enviest so, to come to thee. But hast thou thought of my plans, and art thou willing to execute thine own part in them?”

“Why, I am sold to thee!—I am what thou wilt have me, Cæsar!—I have no excuse now; no refuge in any part of my soul! I am not betrayed—I have fallen—knowingly—fallen below mine own contempt or pity!” returned Fiamma. “But speak on thy words of love: there is a music in them which sounds to me with a kind of gentler anguish, as if one of the damned should hear music dimly floating out of paradise!”

“Then say that thou lovest me, love!—it was a word which was ever cooing on thy lips once,” returned Cæsar, tenderly. “But now—nay, nay, thou dost not love me now!”

“Oh, if I did not love thee, my Cæsar!—woman and lost as I am—we had not met again!” said the hapless lady, sinking into those ready arms.

“Then how couldst thou hesitate to lend me thine aid, seeing on what a balanced ball I waver?” returned Cæsar, in a tone of mingled reproach and tenderness. “Or art thou too—Colonna as thou wert before we loved!—a partisan of the Orsini alliance and of my ruin?”

“The Orsini!—ruthless butchers!—no,” replied Fiamma, vehemently. “But it is strange that thou shouldst wish me to counterfeit thy sister—to play the wanton in thy sister's name!”

“A carnival joke! But it is her nature thou wilt play, and no assumption,” returned the Duke. “Thou dost not wrong her—what manner of damsel she is, all Italy—even you prisoners have heard!”

“Yet if we believed all that we have heard, Cæsar!—if even we could deem it possible!” said Fiamma, with a burning wildness in her gaze which startled even the Borgia.

“I speak not now of the lies that are told of *us*, but of the truths that are told of *her*,” he replied, hastily; and rising, he walked up and down as he continued,—“But since the part mislikes thee, only to some few whom I suspect need you play it—to the captains of the Black Bands thou

shall be another—they are men for the most part of galliard disposition—thou art beautiful, matchlessly beautiful! and for the nonce shall be the wife of our castellan here—but let not Migueloto know the jest till it is well played, for he forsooth is an *hidalgo* and an old Christian! Under this guise, we will invite the captains to some private collation in Santangelo—while the good castellan is abroad, and—why dost thou stare so dismally, as if I bade thee truly—betray myself?”

“Forgive me! I knew not quite how low I had fallen,” said Fiamma, biting her nether lip till the blood flowed, and glaring fixedly upward. “Forgive me—I am not accustomed to be the thing I am—I will abandon myself to it anon—but memory and consciousness!—can only death destroy them?—Can Death?—Why, if so, lies he not couched at the base of these battlements?”

“What marvel that I look in vain around me for some hope, since they who love me best will not pronounce a few words—a few carnival sweetresses—to save me,” exclaimed Cæsar, mournfully. “Canst thou dream, sweet wife, that I would suffer the impious breath of another to profane thy beauty? I alone will meet them in the castle! Amazed at beholding one another there, if even they listen not to my gilded promises, an universal doubt shall arise among them, which will almost serve my purposes as well! Idiot that I was! I had even prepared a masking array such as my jealousy approved! The garb of Queen Morgan le Fay, glittering all over with gems, as if of woven gold-dust—in which I thought to witness the adoration thy loveliness must provoke, humbly following thee in the guise of a black slave,” said Cæsar, assuming an injured and sorrowful air.

“Thou!—why then, indeed, if thou lovest me, I will plague thee fairly even with thine own device,” said Fiamma, suddenly. “And if thou hast any regard for the honour of thy name, methinks I will overplay thy sister’s part, be she all that thou art wont to call her.”

“Thou canst not against one whom I would have thee assay with all the allurements thou knowest but too well how to spread, like a bank of flowers that flatters every sense,” said Cæsar. “Did not Migueloto tell thee of a marvellous Knight of St. John—a religious who keeps his vows—a man of marble who stalks about among us searching into mischiefs against me, as an he were some commissioner sent from above to turn up the edges of our darknesses, and utterly ruin us.”

“Chiefly, methinks I heard that he refused to be Lucrezia’s knight, and with a strange scornfulness,” replied Fiamma.

“So beauteous a dame as some call her—and offering herself with a marvellous unguardedness and warmth!” continued Cæsar. “But hast thou never heard in ballads, my Fiamma, that slighted love makes a colder nun than all the vows of the eleven thousand virgins of Cologne?”

“I may live to know it,” returned Fiamma.

“Never, never, unless your love wanders from mine,” said Cæsar, ardently. “But to continue—Lucrezia was created only for pleasure, as the passion-flower only for light; it is her element, and one frost would fold up her luxuriance for ever. And therein I see a little speck of light which, when it breaks, will flood the sky. Thou knowest, Sabbat prophecies my ruin in Lucrezia’s marriage—but the Orsini must not doubt my love for them and their princely house—and Paolo should have my most zealous assistance, did I but know there is a woman’s fancy in the way to render all, even her sire’s commands, of no avail.”

"But if—if Lucrezia be still so fair as once she was—certes, she will not love in vain," said Fiamma.

"Ob, but thou hast not seen my marvellous Hospitaller—my man of ice," replied Cæsar, gaily. "Yet I would be well assured, ere I use him to my purposes. And thou, who art so skilled in imitating the tones and gestures of others,—disguised and masked—and we are marvellously favoured in Lucrezia's caprice who has refused the Orsini accompaniment, and declares she will view the carnival in some unknown disguise—mayst easily assay his metal, which perchance is false, albeit it rings so silvery clear. Moreover, we can try what rivalry may prompt, for he hath a brother-in-arms, a galliard English noble, who stares at Lucrezia as if he had never seen a woman before, and could not but wonder what manner of gaudy bird it might be! But now I must hasten to send thy munimery and assume mine own; for I noted not, in our love-talk, how broadly the sun had risen. Come!—since thou art such a looker back—remember that thou wert never wont to let me leave thee without one little kiss, freely bestowed, not taken."

The recollection, thus skilfully touched, went to the depths of the fair Roman's soul, and Cæsar left not the battlements without some such pledge of tenderness.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CARNIVAL OF THE JUBILEE.

"They say this town is full of cozenage;
As nimble jesters that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such like liberties of sin."—*Comedy of Errors*.

The Orsini and their noble guests were busily engaged in preparing a gorgeous masque, to form the cortége of Lucrezia in the carnival. A young painter in the train of the Duke of Urbino, named Raffaelo Sanzio, was the chief contriver of the pageantry, and lavished on it the beauty and splendour of his dawning genius, and it was expected to produce an effect favourable to Paolo with Donna Lucrezia, the magnificence and elegance of whose tastes were likely to be gratified in it. Great, therefore, was the disappointment when Burciardo arrived in the palace, with a message from Donna Lucrezia, declining the intended accompaniment; but the refusal was softened by a declaration which was added, that she expected love would take off his fillet for once, and recognize her in whatever disguise she assumed, and meanwhile she desired that the pageant of his triumph, projected by the Orsino, should be exhibited as originally intended. Le Beaufort knew not how to account for the disappointment of his friend; but as the Orsini and their guests were to accompany the Triumph in various characters of the Knights of the Round Table, he enacted his part of the cheerful and chivalrous Sir Launcelot of the Lake with a vivacity which deepened the characteristics of the amorous and melancholy Sir Tristan, assumed by Lord Paolo.

The Duke of Gravina was the representative of the royal Arthur, and he of Urbino, with his frame deformed and blasted with the gout, personated

the enchanter, Merlin. Vitellozzo disdained not to enhance the effect of the spectacle by appearing as a pagan giant, especially as it allowed him to wear armour, out of which, in Rome, he did not feel at ease. The other personages of the round table, familiar to the imagination of all the European populations, were judiciously distributed; and as each knight was characteristically arrayed, attended by his squires, his banner, and minstrels, the spectacle was very splendid. It was only when the knights assumed their masks, in which the passions for which in the chivalric romances they were chiefly renowned, were caricatured by skilful artists, that they became grotesque as suited a carnival show.

The masking commenced at noonday, and the Knight of St. John, wandering almost at random through the city, mingled absently amidst the riot and splendour and universal gaiety of the great Christian saturnalia. At a period of such general dissolution of manners, when in addition to the licentious populations of Italy, the city was crowded with foreigners, the violence of whose passions had brought them thither, and whose customs were infinitely more gross and brutish—the confusion and effervescence passed all ordinary displays, or modern conception. The jubilants, rid of the weight of their sins, and surrounded by all the temptations which the luxurious and dissolute city could offer, abandoning itself to all its fervent passions, too often ran up a new score.

The endless variety of costume which a multitude, assembled from every corner of Europe, must present, was now exaggerated by the wild fancifulness and grotesque gaiety of carnival devices. And though this revelry was common to all the nations of the Christian world, it was practised in such different forms as influenced by climate and national character, that the contrast, when thus thrown into comparison, was a perpetual source of amusement and surprise. The sober northmen beheld with amazement the excesses into which the ardent temperament of the south, released from every shackle, rushed like a gentle river, suddenly falling over rocks in a cataract—all sparkle, uproar, and shining tumult. And the southrons revelling in their own wild gaiety and extravagance, failed not to satirise their visitors with the most laughable buffooneries, ingeniously veiled from the notice of the strangers themselves, whose violence and ignorant pride were justly dreaded by the Italians.

Passing through streets which blazed with banners and pictured tapestries, and flowers and rich ornaments displayed on the balconies and window-sills, which rang with shouts and laughter and ribaldry and roaring music,—the Hospitaller hastened on—he knew not whither. The revellers, imagining that he was disguised in his religious habit to mock it, beset him in various shapes to elicit the jests and sarcasms with which they supposed him to be fraught. A legion of devils surrounded him with hideous visages and flaming torches, imploring his benediction, and leave to return to hell to get out of the noise and clatter of a Christian festival; anon, a giantess caught him in her arms, and with fierce blandishments, made still more fearful by a monstrous mask and beard, assailed him with lascivious love-making. Tearing himself from her powerful embraces, which were in reality those of a huge German soldier, with a difficulty which roused a tumult of laughter, Alfonso became involved in a multitude who were pelting with sweetmeats a long tatterdemalion, bedizened ear, in which came nine women, playing on various instruments of music, all of goodly persons, scarcely at all concealed by the tinselled rags they wore—a circumstance which in that age excited not the slightest animad-

version, but to the contrary, great and general satisfaction. The inscription which they bore on a canopy over their heads, though probably a jest which disclosed their real purposes, revealed the agency of intellects of a higher order than those who executed most of the satirical buffooneries which abounded, many of which were indeed inventions of Machiavelli, who was famous for this species of practical wit.

“ The Muses nine are we—and courtesans of Naples—
Of whose lush clime, in all time, we were counted staples;
To our lord, the Pope, we owe the pomp in which we go,
Our condition, to our lovers—the Princes of the Po.”

Smiling tartly at the allusion to the meagre patronage which the turmoiled pontiff bestowed on the learned, and the meretricious flatteries to which they were reduced by that of the northern courts of Italy, including his father's, Alfonso passed on, encountering innumerable demons, fairies, satyrs, and fauns. Deities of all the ancient and modern mythologies, known, or wildly guessed at from the reports of travellers, met, and engaged in mock disputes and ribaldry, in which every form of religion was turned into ridicule by men at other seasons wrapt in superstitious terrors. The carnivalers seemed to expect that Heaven, like the Roman masters of old, when their slaves enjoyed the license of the saturnalia, would take no notice of what was said or done during this outburst of liberty in its own.

Over all the changeful splendours and ever-varying movement, shone the festal sun of Italy, in whose brightness even a funeral puts on an air of good cheer and enjoyment. The wildest combinations of dreams never presented anything stranger than these of the carnival of the Jubilee; but the glorious effulgence seemed to harmonize all things, and a magic world was created by its glow in which the strangest vagaries of the phantasmagoria were no longer wonderful. Mermaids with their tails calmly folded around them: cormorants who preached burlesque sermons on the top of lofty stiffs, exhorting the people to listen to what they said, which was of such efficacy that they need take no care of their purses; broken columns which walked, and reminded the spectators of the misfortunes of the exiled Colonnas: bears that jeered at them; friars who paraded along with asses' heads and goats' feet; leopards who chaunted Misereres on their hind legs; wolves, with shears in their paws, inquiring for the Christian flock; tigers and monkeys who danced merrily together; enormous owls which sang in melodious concert, refuting augury; nought seemed wild or improbable. Sometimes a group of bacchanals reeled past, imitating in their songs, vine-twisted brows, half-naked forms, and lascivious gestures, the traditions of antiquity, who encountering a grave bevy of nuns, compelled them to drain their goblets, and join in a frantic dance.

National characteristics were rather heightened in colouring than effaced by the chaotic mingling. Spanish stateliness, German grossness and grotesque wildness of fancy, French coxeombry, English humour, appeared in the most resolute efforts to imitate opposite characteristics. In vain was the Spaniard an ape, or the Frenchman a lion: the one stalked, and the other tripped. But when, as frequently happened, pilgrims of the same nation had united to compose spectacles in the style of their respective countries, a magnificent and bizarre effect was produced. Each nation took the opportunity to vaunt its glories before the gaze of the rest; but the most appropriate to the occasion were those of the Spaniards,

leading Moors in chains, and parading some feather-garbed natives of the newly discovered West Indies.

Above all, the Roman lords vied with each other in the gorgeousness and picturesque arrangement of their pageants, and the artistic taste and splendour of these exhibitions astonished the unrefined strangers of the north. Among these Alfonso's attention was much attracted by the Orsini masque, which he encountered in his peregrinations. The beautifully painted banners, borne by the knights of King Arthur, which represented the most touching events produced by the agency of love, in history or romance, flaming in the sun; the resplendent armour and colours of the warriors and their steeds, and the triumph itself, which in elegance and perfection of design resembled a Grecian bas-relief put into motion and vitality, excited universal admiration. On a car of silver, surmounted with a canopy of roses, drawn by six snowy steeds with trappings of flowers, came the god Eros, worthily represented by the blooming young Rafaello, the designer of the spectacle, with wings, arrows, and bow, his lightly-clad form scarcely less beautiful, or more masculine, than the Cupid whom Psyche loved. The Hours, clad in the brightest tints, and linked by chains of roses, danced around his car whenever it halted; immediately after which, in chains, came Anteros, the god of slighted love, and who avenges its pangs, surrounded by his myrmidons similarly shackled, and most expressively masked—Jealousy, Discord, Drunkenness, Scorn, Hate, and other domestic plagues. Anteros was enacted by Fabio Orsino, at his own desire, against the artist's respectful wish that he would take the office of the superior and more joyful divinity. And there was much in his young, sorrowful, and brooding visage, pale as if with the fires of a passion which consumed itself inwardly, to realize the god of "despised love." The Desires, Constancy, Sighs, Chastity, and all the domestic virtues, wielding various appropriate arms, kept guard over these prisoners; and Hymen brought up the rear, holding his unlighted torch to the sun, as if to kindle it at his pure and eternal ray.

Satirical buffooneries abounded: almost immediately after this procession had passed, amidst the acclamations of the people, came a figure of Truth, streaming with water and weeds, as if just risen from her well, who shook her head in reply to the numerous questions addressed to her, pointing to the padlock on her mouth. Then came a Curtius on a lean horse, with a multitude of puppets dressed as French, Spaniards, and Germans, with whom he was going to leap into a gulf for the salvation of his country; a pantaloон hobbled after him, robed as a Venetian doge, and complaining that his French shoes were too tight to walk in. The alliance between Naples and the Spaniards was figured by a fox and a goose waddling along together, bearing the motto "*Amigos á la muerte*"—Friends to death.

It was remarkable that although there were many severe allegorical sarcasms directed at the pope and his daughter, the boldest of the jesters had not ventured to aim at Cæsar—the halving of Don Remiro was too recent an event. In those directed against Lucrezia, however, there was often as much tenderness as blame. It seemed as if the voluptuous southrons could not find it in their hearts to condemn her with severity; and yet Alfonso scanned each new group with the feelings of one who expects every instant to suffer the renewed pangs of some lulled ache. On one occasion he met with a procession escorting a car, on which was a statue very well moulded in wax to represent Lucrezia, but with the attributes of

a Venus, borne in triumph by a crowd of masks, in the habit of cardinals, ringing bells, and profanely calling on all good Christians to love one another, after the good example set them by the heads of the church. Yet almost immediately after he was somewhat comforted by observing a figure advancing along by singular leaps, half toad and half serpent, painted all over tongues, and labelled "Calumny," under cover of which candid acknowledgment he repeated malignant distichs, with surprising versatility and invention, which mystically included the blackest charges against Alexander, his children, and his court, and in whom Alfonso was not long before he recognized Paschino.

Musing on the coincidence, the prince became involved, he scarcely knew how, in the tumultuous throngs which swayed up and down the Corso. Wandering amidst the glittering confusion, and at times scarcely heeding it, his attention was suddenly caught, with that of many others, by the approach of a singular and very magnificent show.

Entering the Corso came a troop of persons in the richest and most glaring Oriental costumes, leaping, dancing, and making the air resound with noisy instruments of music—tambours, bells, cymbals, and gongs, —which kept up an incessant jingle and roar of melody. These heralded a lady, garbed to represent the royal, licentious, and deceptive fairy, Morgana, who was thus suitably attended because that in Italy all fairies were held to be unbelievers, and all unbelievers either Turks or Saracens. She sat in a castle, on the back of an elephant caparisoned with scarlet and gold ; and as it was built of little squares and lozenges of burnished looking-glass set in a silver framework, its sparkle and evanescence answered the ideas entertained of the illusive pomps of the watery fay. The figure of the enchantress was beautifully moulded, and amply displayed in her rich garb of gold lace besprinkled with diamonds as thick as dew. Her hair was concealed by an immense turban, and her face by the most hideous mask imaginable, one half being that of a gorgon, the other of a beautiful woman.

"Viva Morgana !" resounded on every side, and by the throngs which pressed around her, the laughter, and continual clapping of hands. it appeared that the fairy's wit equalled her splendour; moreover, she distributed innumerable little nosegays with which her castle seemed stocked, and pelted the crowd when they pressed on her too eagerly with a storm of gilded sweetmeats. At times she spoke in a pretended eastern language, but which was in reality an ingenious and laughable compound of the dialects of Italy, to a black slave who guided her elephant with a wand of mother-of-pearl, who was arrayed with great splendour to represent the accursed Maomèt himself, and whose face was concealed in a mask which frightfully exaggerated the characteristics of a negro visage, of gigantic size. Wielding a broad and gleaming sabre, the slave affected the airs of a jealous oriental, by flourishing it among those admirers who pushed too near; but ever and anon he turned back, and whispered to some of the maskers whom he selected.

From these signs Alfonso conjectured no good of the fairy, but his interest was strongly excited by remembering that the only elephant in Italy, and on which consequently she was enthroned, belonged to the pope—part of the spoils of Sultan Zem. In his anxiety to ascertain who the lady might be, he pushed eagerly forward among the crowd, and as he approached, the negro's eye gleamed upon him from the depths of his mask; he uttered a screech of joy, and muttered some words to the fairy in

a tone which the uproarious throng could not overhear. Morgana immediately gave a signal to her whole retinue to halt, and beckoned to the Hospitaller so pointedly that he could not doubt he was the personage distinguished by her summons. He approached in a fever of curiosity and fear lest he should find his anticipations verified.

“What would you with me, illustrious fairy?” said Alfonso, in a voice whose tranquil sternness contrasted with the enthusiastic clamour around.

“Nay, what would you with me, Sir Knight of the cross and buffalo?” replied the fairy in tones whose low, liquid, perfidious sweetness resembled those of a syren imitating some fine earthly harmony to lure the mariner amid the crimson flowers blooming among her rocks over festering carcasses. “I am the Fata Morgana—who am all things to all men—even what their own wishes would have! To the soldier, glory; to the priest, dominion; to the poet, immortality; to the lover, his mistress; to every madness, in brief, its proper frenzy; name thou thine.”

“Nay, fairy—since thou art as fallacious as the waves in which thou raisest thy translucent palaces—so sea-green bright without, so dark within,—to sink with all who trust themselves in thy treacherous bowers!” replied the Hospitaller. “Yet if thou canst aid me in my research, I will confess that—I seek for one whom I would not find.”

“Then art thou truly my lord and sultan—I come from the land of Upside Down, whereof I am queen,” said the enchantress. “There the men are bashful, and the women wooers; and as thou seest, hearing the custom prevailed latterly in Rome, I am come here to choose me a seraglio from among all the modest beauties of thy sex—and justly methinks thou art entitled to the most honourable place; therefore mount and accompany me on my elephant, which already kneels of its own grace and understanding.”

The prodigious creature did indeed, at a signal from the negro’s wand, bend its massive knees on the pavement, and with a huge yawn seemed to await the result of the conference.

“Sorceress queen! the order of all nature is too much reversed in your kingdom for me to venture in it, while I still walk erect—even Circe made men hogs before she put them in sties!” returned the severe knight. “Moreover, the disappearances from your seraglio are so numerous and so tragical, that it is conjectured by some there is a hidden snake in it.”

“But I have never loved till now—or I would have made me some charm to stiffen the green reptile, jealousy!” returned the fairy. “Hear but how melodiously I have lamented the circumstance, long before I could have dreamed to bring it in evidence.”

And she sang, or rather chanted, in the same sweet, penetrating, and yet direful voice the following lines, which Alfonso remembered that Bembo had recited to him as the composition of Donna Lucrezia.

DITHYRAMBIC.

For that I love not, Lovers!
Your gentle blame around me hovers,
That bites like quarrelling doves beneath the noon tide covers!
But rather should ye pity show,
As to one fluttering in the windy snow,
That sees, but cannot reach, some sunny glow!—
Fain would I love, and all my soul
Yield to the burning god’s control!
Fain in the universal harmony

No more a discord be!—
 For, better than your choral lyres can prove,
 I feel that all things are attuned to Love!
 There's not a star in Heaven that burns
 Nor flower that upwards lifts its coloured urns,
 Nor murmur of the odorous breeze
 Kissing our soft Italian seas,
 But preaches his religion of delight!
 Music is but his murmuring in dreams,
 Laughter, his footstep flashing over streams,
 His breath, the scent of dewy flowers by night!
 The boundless noonday bush
 His silence is—and twilight's golden blush
 His wakening from the sleep
 Of rosy childhood, to be lulled again
 By brown-robed Night, his nurse, with many an old-world strain,
 So sweet the listeners weep!
 Yea! but Love playing with his grandsire's shafts,
 Are lightnings—else so dread—sabres of unseen hafts!
 Pain,
 The ecstatic wine of life to drain,
 And know existence's extremes of joy and pain,
 Lovers, I would love and be beloved! but 'tis in vain!
 Oh, vainly all things, Love, with thee conspire,
 My soul reflects but warms not in thy fire!
 Yet say not that the faculty divine,
 The infinite desire—are not mine,—
 As all light centred, is the sun,—
 Could all I am be one,
 Thought, feeling, memory, hope, fear, light, breath,
 LOVE it must be or—DEATH!

“If thou hast never loved—why, then, thou hast not even a base apology to be the thing thou art! thou shouldst have been the madness of love, which else thou art of brutish appetite!” returned the Hospitaller, with extreme violence, “Go on thy way, as I will on mine; and may they never cross each other again!”

The populace applauded, considering that the religious knight was sustaining his character.

“I must seek those then who are not so wise as to be miserable—to refuse the quaff of pleasure because other lips have been to the goblet,” returned the enchantress gaily. “But at least thou wilt not refuse to do me this little favour—to bid thy friend, the handsome English knight, come hither, and take the place which thou refusest.”

“This I will do—to prove that I envy it not,” replied the Hospitaller, now thoroughly irritated, and retreating hurriedly among the crowd, who laughed heartily at the conclusion of the dialogue. The fairy made a haughty gesture, the procession moved on, and Alfonso imagined he had torn himself out of its dangerous influence, when suddenly he felt his mantle plucked, and turning he beheld the negro.

“Signor, that you may do your errand better with the English knight, if it be impossible that your own obduracy should relent. Queen Morgan le Fay desires you to accept her portrait in this case,” said the negro, producing an armlet in which was a large gold medallion, which he handed to the knight, attentively watching him as he examined it. The medallion was beautifully chased, and represented a figure of the ancient Lucretia stabbing herself.

“What is the meaning of this?” exclaimed Alfonso.

“Every medal has its reverse,” replied the black, showing his white teeth at the huge lips of his mask, and pressing a spring which flew open and revealed a fine miniature of the celestial countenance of Lucrezia Borgia.

“I will deliver this portrait to Sir Reginald, with your lady's message,”

said the knight, with affected tranquillity. “Return and tell her so.”

“If thou dost this——” returned the negro, speaking in a tone which had nigh betrayed him, but almost instantly changing it. “If thou dost this—thou shalt be canonized alive!”

Laughing bitterly, Alfonso stole away and hastened in the direction in which a short time previously he had noticed the Triumph of Love taking its way amidst the acclamations of the people. But considerably to his surprise and vexation, he had not gone far before he perceived Le Beaufort riding up the street alone, his mask laid aside, and scanning all the groups he encountered with great curiosity.

Summoning all his resolution, Alfonso accosted the young knight, and inquired how it chanced that he was thus alone; to which Le Beaufort dejectedly replied, that, being unable to discover Lucrezia, and afraid that all the fine verses they had prepared would be wasted, it was agreed that they should separate in every direction on a quest after her. “Then art thou as was ever thy wont, Sir Launcelot, the fortunate knight of the adventure!” replied Alfonso; and he related his encounter, delivered his message, and the armlet, without the least outward sign of his inward feelings, but observing the flush which coloured Sir Reginald’s bronzed fairness, he added, “Make haste, make haste!—for thou art one of many!”

“Were it over a precipice, and so fair a damsel summoned me, I would on!” returned Le Beaufort, with enthusiastic delight. “And in very truth, if thou art canonized, as the infidel said, I will light a candle to thee all the year round; for wert even thou in my way—yea, by'r Lady, though thou art my dearest friend—if all good and evil angels stood between!—I know not what I say—but I will learn her pleasure, or perish on the road!”

“Wilt thou not warn thy friend, the Orsino, of the discovery, that he may bear thee company to his lady’s presence?” said the Hospitaller.

“Nay, Don Alfonso, for no true knight would linger to obey a lady’s behest!” replied Le Beaufort, hurriedly, and urging his horse forward. “She may not choose that it should be known—may charge me with some mockery to him;—tut, brother-in-arms, never fear that I shall drown in a cup of water!” And he darted past, putting his courser to a pace which threatened danger to all whom it encountered.

It would scarcely be possible to analyse the confusion of emotions with which Alfonso watched the departure of his young comrade, and which kept him fixed on the spot gazing after him long after he had disappeared. Compassion and anger—regret and disdain and jealousy—were all ingredients; and when at length he resumed his way, regardless whither, the tumult without passed almost unheeded. Cerberuses darted their three heads in his face without making him start; huge frogs leaped in his way, and croaked railly at him, without provoking him to reply; the Furies shook their torches at him; the syrens wooed him with lascivious songs,—and he disregarded both. Even a hydra hissed its many heads at him in vain; and yet his eye understood with little aid of the mind the bold political allegory contained in the carcass of the direful monster, which represented in hieroglyphics the chief disturbers of Italy. The serpent tail represented the Sforzas, whose arms were that reptile; the body, the winged lion of Venice. The lion of Florence, the wolf of Sienna, the panther of Luca, the eagle of Ferrara, the bear of the Orsini; and a variety of other heraldic crests of the factions and states of Italy, all surmounted by

the triple crown, and with a broken column in one of the hydra's paws, by which it limped along, completed the allegory.

Alfonso afterwards remembered that as he quitted the Corso a graceful figure of a Sicilian dancing girl tripped across his path, and beating a tambour above her head, seemed to invite him to join in her amusement. But he hastened on, and although the form still swam in his fancy as one of exceeding beauty, and aërial voluptuousness of outline, he had almost lost the impression when he suddenly found himself in the open space before the Capitol.

CHAPTER XXVI.

*“Ché se ben con effetto io non peccai,
Io dò materia che ognun dica
Ch'essendo vagabonda io sia impudica.”—ARIOSTO.*

For though, in reality, I do nothing wrong,
I give the world occasion to report,
Because I stroll about, that—I'm a bad one, in short!

In the space before the Capitol there was some degree of tranquillity, for it was chiefly those who were weary of the uproar, or who desired to cool themselves by unmasking, that went thither. Their strange accoutrements still formed splendid groupings and kaleidoscope effects of colour, but without the fatiguing confusion of the Corso. It was drawing towards evening, and the deepening purple of the sky mellowed the glaring tints into a sober richness, like autumn foliage at sunset. The moon gleamed pale as an alabaster lamp in the still sun-fraught heavens, but trembled luminously on the waters of a fountain which flowed from beneath the palace of the Capitol. Innumerable groups of the populace, in their strange tinselled disguises, sat or lolled on the ground, discussing the amusements of the day, eating fruit, handing calabashes of wine or water to one another, jesting, laughing, love-making, singing little scraps of the breviary chaunts to droll airs, or profane ballads with choruses from the psalms. Sometimes, seated in circles, they improvised lively epigrams on each other and all around them, or answered remoter groups in jeering songs which occasionally led to words and blows. The Neapolitans, lively as their own polichinelli, contrasted with the Venetians, grave and silent as the waves they lived on; the elegant and vivacious Tuscan, with the sombre and yet fiery Roman; all with their foreign visitors. The oyster-like Batavian might be seen staring in vacant amazement at the supple Greek, as he disported with others in the graceful dances of his country. The German, accustomed to a severe sky, marvelled to behold the Sicilian making preparations to spend the night under the bare stars; and the English islander seemed never weary of listening to the sea-like flow of the Venetian barcarols, while perchance his eye was fixed with astonishment and curiosity on a group of girls who had clubbed nosegays to weave into an ingenious tapestry of flowers. Grotesque parties of more dignified maskers—vizard in hand—paraded up and down, engaged in conversation, and enjoying the sweet coolness of the evening air.

Fevered with agitation, Alfonso made his way to the fountain, and seated on the margin, despite the chattering groups which continually clustered and dispersed around it, felt his spirit calm in the monotony of the buzz, and the rushing gurgle of the waters streaming down the rock

and spouting from various grotesque mouths of lions and dolphins. The shadows deepened, the stars began to sparkle moistly over the blackening cypresses which crowned the hills around, and the innumerable palaces and ruins upon them stood forth in distinctness of splendour or desolation against the brightness of the horizon.

The Hospitaller mused on the events of the day with exceeding bitterness. Without a spice of the vanity of the coxcomb in his lofty and austere character, still he could not have failed to observe that Lucrezia's eyes had discoursed to him something warmer than the gratitude due to her deliverer even from so great a peril. And now her licentious coquetry in the character of the royal sorceress confirmed all the tales of her profligacy—made every darker accusation probable—even gave a gloss of likelihood to the insinuations of Cæsar against her confessor;—for whom would such a Messalina deem unworthy of her arts? The mental agonies which so evidently preyed on the monk, might be the viper-stingings of remorse for his guilt, which—revolving the strange vagaries of superstition he had lately witnessed—it seemed not impossible that Lucrezia might have seduced him into, to secure more easily the pardons which her enormous crimes demanded, and which the church had confided to him! There were moments in this meditation,—when his indignation swelled the highest—that he blamed himself for not accepting her invitation, ascertaining her full depravity, and humbling her with a scorn and refusal which, if aught could, would strike shame and dismay into her haughty soul. It did not occur to the lofty Knight of St. John that the experiment might have proved dangerous.

His cogitations on this point were, however, interrupted by the sound of a tambour; and looking up from his reverie he perceived that the populace were gathering in a wide circle before the fountain, assembling like bees to the musical noise. In the centre—kept thus remote by the vigilance of an old woman and two half-savage Calabrians, well armed, who seemed to be the proprietors of the show—stood a young Sicilian girl preparing to dance, in whose beautiful form Alfonso suddenly remembered his nymph of the Corso. She belonged apparently to a class of damsels who were ordained under severe penalties to go masked, during all the religious festival, to protect the pilgrims from the influence of their baleful charms; for there could be no other reason why a wandering female jongleur or minstrel, who employed the talents which the harmonious climate of Italy lavishes at times on its poorest children, to earn a scanty living from the rude populace—should otherwise affect the modesty and concealment of the vizard which the girl wore, and which was, moreover, of a peculiar form, devised by the pious cardinal of Sienna, with demoniac features well calculated to scare curiosity. But her form, as she stood collecting the spectators with the ringing music of her tambour, in that graceful Sicilian costume, which still retains the characteristic elegance of its Greek original, counteracted all that the hideous mask could do to persuade the gazers that she was hideous too—a form which would have furnished a model for the Muse of Love, and inventress of the dance, voluptuous Erato herself! Alfonso's imagination was perhaps influenced by the reverie in which he had been indulging, but it struck him that the fine proportions of the Sicilian's figure resembled those of Lucrezia's—nay, that they were more exquisitely and womanly soft than his memory recalled Queen Morgan le Fay's.

It was, therefore, an unalloyed, because not perilous delight, to gaze

upon so perfect a specimen of nature's divinest workmanship ; but while thus innocently amusing his disturbed fancies, the knight became aware that he had attracted the notice of the *ballerina*, for he encountered her eyes beaming at him with earnest attention, from the depths of a green and speckled mask, which was intended by its ordainer to represent the corruption of disease, but which the comic humour of the populace had transmuted into a pleasant association by calling such wizards—cardinal melons.

The ballerina started from a somewhat listless attitude into one of gaiety and animation when she saw how earnestly the knight surveyed her ; and tripping lightly over the circle, she paused before him, and said in a voice whose music flowed to his heart in its mingled tenderness and humility, “Holy knight ! this is a Christian day !—will it disdain you to dance the tarantella with a poor Sicilian sinner, for the love of Saint Rosalie?”

“Thou art like to make many for thine own, fair sister,” replied the Hospitaller. “But I do not mask in this array, as perchance thou deemest, and as too many of my brethren do ; and therefore it were but little seemly to behold a sinner in my weeds link in the dance with a sinner in thine.”

While he spoke the knight gazed with such interest and curiosity in the masked visage of the ballerina that so much of her fair neck as was visible rosied all over.

“Nay, then, I must use my spells,” she replied after a moment's thought, and glancing round the circle, which was now increased by many personages, among whom the toad of Calumny had squatted himself tranquilly in the foremost row to listen, and beings so opposite as a friar—who had paused on the skirts of the throng—and the devil himself, with his hoofs, tail, and horns, who was leaning elegantly on his pitchfork—were now assembled. “My spells !—to raise the dead, since love and pleasure are dead in thy dedicated soul !—mother, my mandolin.”

The populace listened to this dialogue with the interest which the southern imagination takes in all displays of the sensual talents : and when the improvisatrice, for such she seemed to be from the impromptu subject of her lay, threw her tambour over her fine shoulders by its silver chain, and took the instrument which one of her attendants brought, the whole multitude stood hushed as lovers listening to a nightingale. The smile on her lips shone even through the mask, and indeed there was something of magic fascination in the effect which the tenderness and sweetness of her tones produced as she said, tuning her mandolin, “But first you must answer me a question fairly—or I shall not know which of my spells to use, for, with some, memory hath the only sorceries—with others, hope !” And she began to sing in a voice of indescribable harmony the following verses—which the reader must not forget were sung in Italy—in the carnival—and at the close of the fifteenth century.

I.

“ Know'st thou the pain—that is sweeter than pleasure?
The joy brightly sad as the sun's crimson parting?
That comes like the lightning—
All withering, or bright'ning!
And with serpents of fire flow the veins in its darting,
And the grief and the rapture are both without measure !

II.

“ Know'st thou the moment—when Love first Love meeting
Eyes mingle in music—glance lightens in glance ?

When hearts vainly panting
 Quaff all that was wanting;
 And the dreams of desire link in ecstasie dance,
 And Hope seems eternal—Ahas! when most fleeting?"

The songstress paused, seemingly to await a reply to her question, amidst murmurs of delight; and there was as light tremulous heaving in her bosom, as if she really expected it with anxiety. The first sounds of her voice fixed the attention of Alfonso, and not alone for its exquisite purity and sweetness, which arose like the musical murmur of a fountain, descending in showers of silver warblings; for it seemed to him that, if he could ever have heard Lucrezia sing, the passionate playfulness of her spirit might have vented itself in similar strains. But his reply partook of the asperity which every recollection of her now kindled. "Dost imagine, pretty vagabond, such gossamer subtleties were like to find anchorage in a large, rude, and restless breast like this, which—thou hearest—I strike, and it answers only with a jangle of steel?"

"Nay, then it is worse with thee;—where the pure spirit comes not, the dark one will!" continued the ballerina, continuing her song in a voice of still more voluptuously penetrating and luxurious sweetness:—

III.

"Knowst thou the madness?—the storm of emotion,
 When lips join their roses all fraught with the sun?
 When Love in Love fuses
 His essence, and loses,
 All passion—all feeling—all memory in one!—
 And the calm that fills heaven—repose's rapt ocean?"

The melting softness of the ballerina's voice; the grace of her form; the humility of her attitude of entreaty; the subduing languor of the glowing twilight; his recent tumult of passions; a strange suspicion which entered his mind—must all be pleaded in excuse for the religious knight, when we confess that while the last dulcet notes of the stanza admirably imitated in their dying harmony the delicious serenity of the thought—he started up, and attempted to clasp her in his arms, exclaiming, "Nay, but by even as sweet a place, thou shalt teach me thy sweetest science, or ere we part!"

"Thou hast forgotten, knight!—thou wearest the livery of holy St. John, as you admonished me but now!" said the ballerina, laughing with musical softness, but eluding the seizure with a grace and dexterity which raised an universal acclaim of delight and applause in the spectators. Pausing on perceiving that the discomfited knight had checked himself, and stood looking at her half in vexation and half in admiration and surprise, she continued laughingly, "Oh, I could teach thee a much sweeter lesson—but you men will never learn it, long as women have been trying to teach it on earth, poor souls!—There's none of ye all can answer 'Yea' to this turn in the tune!"

And then with a spiritual gaiety which yet mingled melancholy in its marvellous tenderness, she continued:—

IV.

"Knowst thou the bliss,—when, like flames in the light,
 Man's love melts in woman's, and shares its serene?
 When like odours of flowers
 From night's dewy bowers,
 Souls mingle in souls—and our softness, your might,
 Make the one Heaven intended,—Ah, would it had been!"

"And wilt thou teach me such a science as this!—Wherefore wear you then that mask?" returned the Hospitaller, striving to put the severity in his tones which was very far from being in his heart.

"To please—monsieur the cardinal of Sienna!" replied the ballerina, with a curtsey and an archness in the expression which produced a general murmur of laughter, accompanied with cries of "Melons, melons, who'll buy?" from the representative of his satanic majesty. Then as if inspired by an influx of gaiety and derision, the enchanting ballerina laid her mandolin aside, and beating her tambour to a lively air, improvised what follows:—

"To prevent a schism,—
Through in this carnival,
By order of the cardinal
Reverendissime,
We wear masks as frightful as any in a dream,
Beneath it—I'll not say—
But if you ran away,
At the sight of a rose undoubtedly you scream!
So in the world's at large—
Stranger, listen, now I charge!—
I am not—I swear it—I am not what I seem!"

These last words were pronounced with a fervour and even passion which more than ever excited the curiosity of Alfonso.

"I do believe it!—art must have perfected even so special a marvel of nature's handiwork!—and thou speakest the golden language of courts!" exclaimed he, gazing at her in incredulous amazement.

"The thing goes well," said he of the club-feet at this point, "What are those cursed Agonizants beginning their psalms for now?"

"It is yonder croaking Dominican!" said the toad of Calumny. "But he is silent again; he began with a Laudamus that stuck in his throat."

"I'll pitch him a stave to the tune!" returned the Evil One, blithely.

"For all men's miseries, but chiefly to see 'em
So thankful for wretchedness—Laudamus Deum!"

A distant chorus of bacchantes replied in dog Latin,

"Deus noster est ille quo primus
Vinum bibimus
Bacchus, Io!"

"Peace, peace, they are at it again—and the parley is to my taste!" shouted the fiend.

"I doubt if Lucrezia herself sings better when she charms the rage out of Father Jupiter," exclaimed the toad.

"Well!—what wouldst thou—with me?" said Alfonso, in a staggered and yet fascinated tone. The ballerina replied, as her wont was, in verse.

"I would twine my thoughts in garlands—but the roses would betray,
With their blushes—wishes which—what is it I would say?—
By your smiles, ah, ye guess!—then the lily, if I chose?—
The lily's pale with passion—tells truth like any rose!—
The yellow jacinth would declare some jealousy within!—
How shall I tell him—that I love!—without a deadly sin!"

"It is a song which thou hast ready for all accosters.—How canst thou pretend to love me?" returned the Hospitaller in a tone which betrayed in its wavering the tumult within. "But wherefore dost thou shrink away thus?"

"Nay, if thou wilt not dance with me, I must look for another partner, for my mother grows impatient, as you may see by the twirling of her

girdle," returned the ballerina pettishly. "I never cared who 'twas before—and now, merely because I like you, you hate me!"

"Thou knowest it is the bite of a poisonous spider which the tarantella dances away;—kiss me, then, thou lovely serpent, and perchance I shall go mad too!" returned the fascinated Hospitaller.

"Nay, 'tis not a Sicilian custom for the women to give—but for the men to take!" said the dancing-girl, with a pretty disdain glowing over so much of her complexion as was visible.

"Neither, by my faith, shall it be mine!" exclaimed the vanquished Knight of St. John, darting forward to grasp his prey, as he imagined; but again eluding him, she fled before him in a maze of the most graceful movements, which mingled at once allurement and laughing refusal. The knight pursuing with a resolution to capture her, and involuntarily following her rapid evolutions in the attempt, quite naturally and unconsciously performed his part in the dance—which like most southern dances expressed the amorous coquetry of two lovers, who alternately woo and disdain with the mute language of gesture and voluptuous motion. And, to complete her mockery of his efforts, the ballerina continued to sing even amidst all the velocity and vagaries of her dance.

V.

"Yes! till Time snatches Youth's wine-cup away,
Breathless, we'll quaff every draught of delight!
Wearing the hours
Like a garland of flowers,
Only of those that are fragrant and bright,
And fresh with the gold-dews of Love or of May!"

Adding with a continual variety of laughing music,

"But kisses are showers
That should fall but by night!"

The merriment of the spectators at his continual failures in entrapping the nimble ballerina, who celebrated her escapes with triumphant changes in the lively air on the tambour to which she accompanied her evolutions, seemed to bring the Hospitaller to a sense of the ridicule in his position. But in reality it only inspired him with an artful ruse. He feigned now to perform his part in the dance of love in a legitimate fashion: he retreated, and the nymph—somewhat warily at first—came treading the air with wooing gestures, expressive of despair, or hope, or tender entreaty. After long coyness on the lover's part, the damsel in her turn grows scornful and indignant, and retires. The lover then repents, and kneels for forgiveness, when like a butterfly returning in fluttering circles to a flower from which it has been frightened, the damsel gradually approaches him.

Brilliantly and gracefully as light playing on circles in the water, and with as rapidly sparkling steps, did the young dancing-girl return. The genius of pleasure animated her every movement, and breathed such essences of delight around her that the sunset air seemed like a rosy emanation from her beauty filling all heaven and earth with fragrance and colour.

The wily Hospitaller concealed the throbbing of his heart, and affected to kneel, and go through his loving pantomime with little more than the customary gestures expressive of passion and submission. The disdainful circles narrowed, and the beautiful form swam nearer and nearer in his

intoxicated gaze—and still he controlled his impatience. The populace looked on with increased delight, struck with the incongruous attitude of the religious knight, and testified their enthusiasm with an uproar of joyful shouts and exclamations. Showers of silver, and even gold, which fell in the circle, showed that the jubilants had not exhausted their resources in pious contributions, and were greedily collected by the old woman and her comrades; while several masked magnificoes who joined the crowd whispered the hag, and gave her rings and other rich pledges, all which she accepted, and seemed to repay the donors in a less substantial coin of promises.

But the Hospitaller's moment had now arrived, when the relenting fair one at length concluded her mazy circles by forming one with her arms over his head, in token of forgiveness. But instead of rising and concluding the dance with the usual reverse of matters, the knight threw his arm dexterously round her waist, and fairly captured the brilliant fugitive.

“Our dance is not on equal terms, for thou canst see in my face how my wrath is but feigned, while thine is hidden!” he said, trembling with eagerness. “Let me remove thy mask, and behold if there be two faces on earth to match that matchless form!—Moreover, for mine order's sake, I will teach thee henceforth not to throw resistless temptations in the way of holy men!” And he strained the soft form with such violence to his breast that he probably hurt the unfortunate ballerina against the iron plates whose janglings he had boasted, for she uttered a faint cry, and called out in great terror, “Mama Faustina, rescue!—carnival, carnival!” And before the words were well uttered, the old woman with her two Calabrians, the latter with daggers drawn, rushed towards them. The mob also raised the shout of “Carnival, carnival!” and seemed to project a forcible rescue. The uproar changed the nature of the ballerina's alarm.

“In our Holy Mother's name, forbear!” she exclaimed, waving to the Calabrians and the mob to keep off, and turning to her capturer she murmured in a tone of almost abject entreaty, “Release me, noble knight!—indeed I am not what I seem—and to be recognized would be my ruin!—Nay, I will confess all!—I am a waiting damsel of my Lady Donna Lucrezia—and have but put this jest upon you to know whether you hated all womankind, or only so bad a one!”

“Thou hast stolen her rosy fragrance too!” muttered the amazed Hospitaller. “But that it is impossible!—or is she indeed a sorceress!—Whatever chance I will satisfy this doubt!”

“Mercy, dearest knight!—thou knowest 'tis a grievous flagellation to be seen without my cardinal melon!” murmured the ballerina, with a return of the willing witchery to her tones, and attempting, but in vain, to glide from his arms.

“Oh, if thou art not she—I will prove by loving thee more than all womankind that I hate not all!” exclaimed the bewildered Hospitaller. “And thou art not—it cannot be—yonder the fiendish enchantress comes!” and half releasing her, he gazed like one in a distempered dream towards the Corso, along which, attended by a concourse of admiring gazers, the procession of Fata Morgana was passing.

“Certes, I am not yonder sumptuous lady—my mistress!” returned the prisoner, tremulously, but with exceeding eagerness.

“Release the harlot!—how darest thou—thou, a soldier of the church!

—to break the commands of the Apostolic Lieutenant!” exclaimed a husky voice, while a strong hand grasped the shoulder of the knight, who turned and beheld the Dominican, Fra Bruno, whose countenance flamed with fanatic wrath.

“Ay, and it hath come to my turn to rescue damsels, and moreover to serve the church!” added another speaker, in fierce tones, whom Alfonso recognized instantly to be Oliverotto da Fermo, although he was disguised in an extraordinary paraphernalia of gilt scales, contrived to make him resemble a huge fish moving about on its tail. But luckily his only weapon appeared to be an enormous hook, baited with a doll, on which was inscribed, with dullard wit, “To catch Bears.” This, however, he held high and menacingly in the air.

“Friar, look to your ally, if such he be—lest I do what I should have done the other night, and make a very harmless rogue of him!” said Alfonso, not abandoning his clutch of the ballerina with one hand, though he grasped his sword with the other.

“Peace, Oliverotto!—is it indeed the Knight of the Holy Sepulchre?” returned the monk, drawing his ally forcibly back. “Let the woman go, good son!—you know the cardinal’s decree,—and it disgraces you!”

“I did but rebuke her for the scandal she would have brought on my livery.—It is fit to punish her by removing her mask,” said the knight, somewhat confusedly.

“Nay, father, by the bruises which still ache me all over, I will return my wrong, and rescue the wench!” said Oliverotto, again raising his massive hook. The monk and some bystanders interposed, partly with words, and partly by forcing themselves between.

“Now, then, I am like to have good sport—a monk, a woman, and a soldier!—I require no more to set the world in a blaze,” said the club-footed mask, grasping his pitchfork as if prepared to take a share in the riot.

“Knight!—I implore thee!—Release me, and I swear thou shalt behold my face without any mask, even of glass!” whispered the ballerina, with passionate entreaty, amidst the noisy tumult of expostulations and rage. “I would not be known to yonder monk for all the world!”

“Ay!—but by what oath wilt thou swear—which even Lucrezia Borgia would not dare to break,” returned the knight.

“By the desire I have to see thee again!” replied the ballerina, pouring the blue lightning of her eyes from her mask with a mixture of terror and laughing indignation into those of the obdurate Hospitaller.

“The when and the where?” he replied, hurriedly, and completely bewildered with the expression of those brilliant eyes, which for the first time throughout the scene had fully encountered his own.

“Be at the gate of San Sebastian when the moon is three hours older—Faustina shall guide you thence to my abode—in the grotto of Egeria!” returned the ballerina, falteringly.

“The grotto of Egeria!—the gardens of Lucrezia Borgia!” exclaimed the knight.

“Ay, but each of her favourites has a key—and I am one: you need not fear to meet my devilish mistress there to-night!” exclaimed the ballerina. “She is wickedly busy elsewhere: you can believe that?”

But, at this moment, the cry among the people warned Alfonso that the Lord of Fermo’s indignation had at length mastered every effort to

restrain him ; and whirling round to defend himself, he was thus compelled to release the gleemaiden, or whatever she might be called. But instead of making the use which might be expected of her liberty, she shrieked wildly to the monk, yet in a voice which struck the Hospitaller as simulated, to part the fray in the name of all the saints, and the obligations of the Jubilee.

“Villain of Fermo!—get thee arms, and I will satiate justice upon thee,” said the Hospitaller, half unsheathing his sword.

“Beware, beware!—yonder comes Donna Lucrezia, with all her attendance,” continued the ballerina, in a strangely altered voice. Christ’s peace, Christ’s peace! all of ye keep it, in the name of our Lord, the Pope, and the Church.”

“Yes, it is Donna Lucrezia!—tis but a witness the more of the chastisement thou shouldst receive, assassin!” shouted Alfonso, still unwilling to draw his sword against the hook of the ruffianly baron.

“Lucrezia!—yonder?” repeated the monk, gazing earnestly in the direction indicated, and as the procession was now approaching, the elephant was visible, with the fairy enthroned in her castle on it. And, moreover, the glistering figure of Sir Reginald was seated beside her, as if in triumph: while the magnificent pageant of the Orsini surrounded it, and peals of music shook the air. Fra Bruno stepped forward, and in that brief pause the light-stepped ballerina had disappeared.

Oliverotto also looked somewhat alarmedly at the approaching spectacle. “Since thou knowest me, I care not to find myself among a crowd of Borgians, with a pretext for a seizure,” he said to the Hospitaller. “But, trust me, we will meet some day where there shall be no interruption. Meanwhile I have given thee an olive for a fig—the girl is gone—and so, for the nonce, farevell.”

The Lord of Fermo then turned on his heels—for heels he had below his fan-like tail; and Alfonso, much less anxious to pursue his quarrel than to ascertain who the fascinating ballerina was, turned eagerly to look after her. But she was gone—she and her attendants—and in the agitation of the tumult no one had noticed whither. Fra Bruno himself deigned to make inquiries on this subject, and finding them in vain, hurriedly moved off towards the pomp of Queen Morgan le Fay.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“In vallem Egeriæ descendimus et speluncas
Dissimiles veris.” JUVENAL.

We have descended into the valley of Egeria,
And her rocks unlike the real ones.

“‘Tis a most lovely light-of-love you have lost, signor, by this clinking of metal,—yet it is not often that Mars frightens away Venus,” said he of the cloven hoofs, accosting the Hospitaller as he was looking in vain for his fugitive partner.

“The devil can speak truth, they say; but I believed it not until now,” replied the knight. “If I mistake not, I speak to Messer Niccolò of Florence?”

“Even to no better a man—when my mask is off,” replied the ambassador, suiting the action to the word.

“Have you seen this singing-wench before?—Know you aught of her?” said the knight with much anxiety.

“You should have asked me these questions ere I drew off my mask,” replied Messer Niccolò, smiling. “But although ‘tis certain it swims in my memory that I have seen her elsewhere, I trust the fiend I represent has forgotten as much as I have—where.”

“‘Tis strange!” mused Alfonso. “The same thought has occurred to me.—Marked you, Messer, the magnificent show of Donna Lucrezia to-day?—As the enchantress Morgana?—and in very truth I deem she is a sorceress, and can be in two places at once!”

“The enchantress Morgana!—the personage with whom our fellow-traveller, Sir Reginald—by our lady! he is like to prove the Adonis then of our modern Venus!” exclaimed Machiavelli. “I saw him seated beside her in her castle, and there was a sweet love-toying going on as ever I noted in two billing doves!—The luck of these boys is marvellous.”

“Bet yet I think—I doubt—I am sure it could not be Donna Lucrezia!” said Alfonso, hurriedly.

“I have but your authority for supposing so, signor,” replied Machiavelli, smiling. “Yet ‘tis no harm to say that if she it was, I envy the English barbarian his place more than the cherubim theirs!”

“I had rather change it with one of your courtiers b-low, master devil!” said the toad, who had squatted himself familiarly near the interlocutors. “It were the cooler place.”

“Ha, Calumny!—tell us the worst thou canst of her: we are in a mood to believe all now,” said Alfonso, affecting indifference and hilarity.

“The worst I know of her is very good,” replied the toad, grinning. “Her virtues are carried to excess—that is all. She is a daughter only too dutiful—a sister only too affectionate—a Christianella only too universal in her love!”

“Have a care thou dost not some day see thy tongue in a dish before thee!” said Messer Niccolò.

“I should marvel if I saw my eyes out—that is all, in Rome,” replied the toad. “But I will hence where my conversation is more like to be appreciated, for yonder knight is as fast asleep with his eyes open as ever I was with mine shut, though I slept very soundly last night in the portico of the Orsini palace—for since his holiness frowned the other day, the resort has not been great thither.”

Alfonso was indeed absorbed in a reverie which all the cynical wit of Machiavelli, though at present much to his humour, could not dissipate. He began to imagine himself under the influence of some species of nympholepsy, for in spite of his conviction that Lucrezia was the enchantress of the fairy pageant, in spite of the marvellous improbability that so proud and lofty a lady would mingle in the wild revelry in so lowly a disguise—it haunted him that the Sicilian ballerina was Lucrezia herself!

Notwithstanding the improbability, not to say impossibility, of this supposition, at times he cherished it, when he dwelt on Machiavelli’s allusion to Sir Reginald’s treatment by the fairy, Morgana; then again it troubled him inconceivably to think that Lucrezia and the ballerina were not one and the same! But when the Florentine had left him, to share in the diversions which were to conclude the day’s amusements, and he

had leisure to recall the indescribable fascinations to which he had been subjected, his fancy warmed so glowingly in the recollection, that—he came to the conclusion that his only motive in resolving most religiously to keep his appointment was to be well assured the ballerina was not Lucrezia!

In this mood it may be imagined with what impatience he watched the gradual rising of the moon, which showed herself not in the least inclined to hurry on his account. Three hours after, according to the ballerina's compact, he was to present himself at the gate of San Sebastian, to await her messenger. But it cannot be denied that during that long lapse—immeasurable it seemed to the Hospitaller—when his mind reverted to the supposition of her identity with Lucrezia, some chilling doubts came over the sultry reverie. If the lady of the Borgias was indeed the dreadful being she was represented—animated by passions so terrific—might she not meditate vengeance for the affronts he had put upon her? And, moreover, what if the Dominican had communicated the purpose of his alleged embassy from Ferrara,—was not that alone sufficient to kindle her haughty blood into flame; or might he not have communicated to others, still more merciless, to whom detection and exposure were still more formidable? And when he remembered the spot assigned for the interview—gardens with which Lucrezia had embellished the beautiful valley consecrated by the legend of the Roman lawgiver and his nymph—the tales of the Neapolitan poets occurred to him, whose wanton imaginations revelled in descriptions of the secret haunts of pleasure which they ascribed to Lucrezia, like those of the enchantresses of old. Not satisfied with imputing to her every lascivious excess, in these bowers, they pretended that the only distinction between her and the ancient Circe was, that the latter contented herself with transforming the lovers of whom she was weary into beasts and reptiles, while the former secured the silence of hers in a much more efficacious manner.

But such was the ardour of discovery in the knight's breast, that no consideration of danger had influence with him; and nearly an hour before the appointed one his shadow walked darkly beside him over the desert Aventine. The sight of the ruins in which Fra Bruno dwelt rekindled some of his wildest fancies, and he paused with a degree of irresolution; but a sweet breath of roses blown to his lips by a chance breeze so forcibly recalled one of the most insidious charms of the ballerina, that he hastened on, wondering at his own hesitation. The way was nearly solitary until he passed the magnificent temple of St. John Lateran, which was crowded with devotees; and the Hospitaller felt a vague feeling of remorse and apprehension steal over his heart as he glided past the shrines of the saint, the garb of whose martial professors he had assumed, bound on such an errand, and heard the lugubrious chaunt of the funeral mass which, even on this day of her triumph, the church dedicated to her fifteen hundred years of departed faithful.

Passing through the gate of San Sebastian, the open Campagna was before him—a sea of long, flowery grass broken only by remote arches of ruined aqueducts, or a few solitary tombs, and bounded by wave-like mountains whose tops shone silvery in the moonlight. The only living objects visible were a few sheep or goats; the only sounds audible were distant warblings of shepherds' pipes, who diverted themselves by night after the traditional manner of their Arcadian predecessors. The sky was still tinged with glowing tints towards the west, and the solemn heads of

one or two solitary pines had not quite abandoned the reflection. The contrast of the purity and serenity of nature to his turbulent passions somewhat restored the Hospitaller's reason. He strove to disgust himself by recalling the lascivious pictures which the Neapolitan satires presented of Lucrezia and her court; and almost imagined that he had resolved to depart, without waiting to see the result of the adventure, when he beheld the old woman approaching whom the ballerina called Faustina, and in a contrary direction from the city. Now was the moment to put his determination in practice—instead of which he hurried forward to meet her.

“O, my son, is it thou! well, God be praised! you are very early; but they do say lovers' feet are not asses', and 'tis all the better, for disappointment comes soon enough, and I bring it,” said the old woman much agitated, and seemingly out of breath.

Alfonso's virtuous resolutions vented themselves only in an echo full of the meaning of the word. “Disappointment! what mean you, mother? It is impossible—here is gold. She promised, she swore to let me behold her face without a mask—which is all that I ask! A few moments will suffice, and in your presence.”

“Fie upon thee, son!—gold!—for what dost thou take me? Nay, if I take them, it must be to offer to the Jubilee, for indeed I have only bestowed two candles for the good of my soul,” said the beldame, with indignation, but pocketing the coins. “Yet understand me, my son; I tell you, it is impossible—unless we put all our heads in a lion's mouth. Thou wilt believe me when I tell thee, my poor son, that my lord the Duke of Romagna has taken a caprice for our ballerina, and sent her a lapful of ducats, and word that it is his pleasure to hear her sing some of her pretty songs to-night!”

Alfonso was instantly struck with the incongruity of this statement with that which the ballerina had communicated to him of her real rank; and his second thought was one that thrilled through his blood like the scorpion's bite. The old woman probably mistook the nature of his agitation, imputing it to the terror which so formidable a rival was likely to produce.

“And where doth she attend him—in his palace?” said the Hospitaller, taking refuge in the thought that it was not unusual in great households, at festivals, to invite such persons as the ballerina to entertain the guests with their talents. “You came in the direction, and I heard that—she promised me an interview in the gardens of Lucrezia Borgia!”

“Lucrezia Borgia! marry, where learned you that familiarity?” said Faustina, somewhat disconcertedly staring at the knight. “It is the most illustrious Lady Donna Lucrezia who gives the feast, at which our ballerina is to sing by the duke's command; but the feast is not to be till the night is older—and meanwhile I go to inform his highness that he is obeyed, for my daughter is there.”

“Why there are yet a few precious minutes; hobble a little on thy way, and I shall have become air ere ye return!” said Alfonso, with infinite eagerness, and seconding his entreaties with the more eloquent persuasions of gold.

“In very sooth thou deservest not to be so wretched, my beloved son, whom I cherish like my first-born, or the sweet lady I reared with my own milk, wicked old wretch that I am!” said Faustina, unguardedly, and with something of remorse in her tones. “An if she dared, she would have been as glad to see you as your mother from a battle—and ten times

gladder. But thou knowest—the Duke of Romagna is no fool's bladder, that hits and gives no headaches."

"I know the peril I run; and therefore 'tis certain I shall not delay to fall into it," returned the Hospitaller.

"Oh, but lovers never hear vespers rung. Moreover, she would be mad if she thought I had betrayed her secret—for the poor soul loves you so, she would fain have you believe—that she loves people for nothing," continued the disgusting old wretch, and yet there was something in the thought which touched Alfonso, for he felt certain it could not have originated in the mind of the beldame.

"I promise you by—nothing holy indeed—but may all the sins that have brought men to this Jubilee be imputed to me, if I betray thee," returned the knight. "I will feign some excuse—or rather, in very truth, I go only to put a scorn upon her for her vileness in attempting to corrupt one of my order."

Faustina glaneed at him with a look which only a Roman hag can give, her black eyes flaming like gassy coals; and then she burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, which subsided only in an as immoderate fit of coughing.

"Bones of holy January! to hear him talk!" she exclaimed. "But in good faith, I was thinking thou wert little less than mad to come on a love adventure armed cap-à-pie! Yes, my sweet child, I will trust thee—nothing could have fallen better. Go on thy way; if any note thee, they will take thee for an officer of the duke. Here is a pass-key; thou hast but to follow the windings of the garden to a grotto where she is—or will come very shortly, for indeed I have lighted on you sooner than I expected."

"Go on thy way, then, too, and I shall know that I have no time to lose," replied the Hospitaller, hastening from the society of the ballerina's respectable parent. "When we meet again I will double what I have given thee."

"I am old, sir knight, but note that I go at a good step!" screamed the beldame, setting off, indeed, at a pace into which she could, perhaps, scarcely have been whipped on a better errand.

Thus, then, were all his riddles simplified to the fortunate envoy—he had but to ascertain without a doubt that the ballerina was Lucrezia Borgia, which, he now discovered, he had all along believed.

The way was not unknown to him, and taking a path which branched off to the left, he arrived among some ruins, apparently of a temple, which crowned a steep unnoticed in the general wave of the Campagna towards Naples. Below lay a wooded valley, into which he began to descend, after passing through a gate in a hedge of aloes, matted together with every species of odorous climbing plant.

The thoughts which Alfonso ruminated were certainly not inspired by the genius of the place. The enervating perfume of flowers saluted him on every side, for the underwood of the bank which he descended by an ingenious labyrinth of windings to the valley beneath was formed of fragrant shrubs, and the most richly coloured and scented productions of the profuse Flora of Italy. The myrtle, laden with thoughts of love, glittered tearfully in the moonlight; lavender breathed its fine essences with the benign perfume of the bay; roses innumerable filled the air with their heavenly breath, and their dewy crimson reminded Alfonso—and yet with a shudder—of Lucrezia's perfect mouth. The wood itself was

chiefly of oranges, cedar, and wild fig-trees, all in full blossom, and exhaling the most intoxicating odours, intermingled with a few stately oaks, the graceful foliage of the willow and laburnum, or slender boles of the ash and sycamore, gleaming high in the silvery air.

From the depth of the valley came the musical murmur of a stream, mingled with the songs of innumerable nightingales which seemed to have colonized so congenial a residence. And if his ear did not mock him, the knight distinguished faint murmurs of flutes and other sylvan music, which came and died away on the evanescent breezes. Within there was an air of wildness, as if nature only had abandoned herself to this profusion of loveliness, and no trace of art was obvious to break the spell with which it delighted the senses. Even the statues of rural divinities which occasionally appeared, startled rather by a vague impression of existence and reality, than as wonders of artificial creation.

Descending through this bosquet of Eden, Alfonso came to a dell at its base on a bank of the stream whose verdure was—to use a worn-out phrase, but here literally true—enamelled with flowers. The moon shone so brightly that the superb tints of those myriad blooms were softened, but not lost in the shade; even the dark violets displayed their purple, edged with golden light. The stream flowed through the middle of the valley in a gentle, copious, and perfectly translucent wave, bordered on the other side by a similar meadow, and another climbing wood.

As yet the Hospitaller had not encountered a single living thing; but so absorbed was he in his dark thoughts that he never once noticed the circumstance until he reached the edge of the stream, and paused in doubt which way to turn. But remembering that its spring flowed from the grotto of Egeria, he turned his steps against the stream, and proceeded, sometimes kicking away in impatience the broad aquatic flowers which willowed from their waters over the edge. A little higher the waters formed a cascade, over which the statues of Flora and Pomona bent towards one another, entwining flowers and fruit, as if gracefully exchanging presents, into an arch. Beyond the cascade the meadow opened in a circular form, and immediately in front arose a lofty bank in which appeared the mossy entrance to the grotto of Egeria, whence flowed the perennial fountain by whose waters, three thousand years agone, the Roman lawgiver had caught inspiration from the lips of love.

Taste was yet a word unapplied in its modern sense, but the poetical imagination of the fair restorer of this solitude was one of those from which its rules might have been deduced. Art only imitated the affluent caprices of nature in the adornment of this charmed retreat. The rocks overhead preserved their native moss; the wild vine clambered with the wild rose and still wilder fig-tree, ostentatiously spreading its large flame-coloured blossoms among their crags; drops dribbled through the interstices, and streamed down the long green hair of the creeping plants which hung from their fissures. Even the profusion of sweet-scented flowers seemed only to prove that nature herself had taken an exceeding delight in the place, and had decked it with her most lavish magnificence for her own retreat from the glowing suns of her beloved Italy.

The Knight of St. John paused at the entrance of the grotto, though the archways of honeysuckle hanging over it, stirred by the breeze, shook the sugared dew from their sea-shell coloured bells in his face, as if to refresh and invite him in. It was not any wavering of purpose—he had determined, at whatever risk, to learn who the ballerina was—but he was struck

with amazement at the silence and magic solitude which seemed to reign in the supremely beautiful scene before him, where he had expected to find Lucrezia and the ministers of her direful pleasures.

The traveller who at this day visits the valley of Egeria will be reversely disappointed to the great Roman satirist who went away execrating all that art had done in the embellishment of the poetical site : he will miss the natural charms with which the imagination of Lucrezia had wrought out the sweet fable of the antique world. Time and barbarous hands have been at work, defacing, and scarcely so much of Lucrezia's retreat remains as the knight beheld forming a grotto over the fountain at the opposite extremity before him. The rest was an irregular dome, composed of slender twigs matted with vines, honeysuckles, and other twining plants, supported as on pillars of verdure by the trunks of the trees up which they climbed, and walled with moss and espaliers of flowers, sometimes admitting some uncertain flickers from without, but in general excluding all exterior light. Yet this was rendered unnecessary by the soft and milky radiance of an alabaster lamp, shaped like a moon suspended, no one could tell by what means, in the herbage above the fountain, while a flight of Cupids seemed endeavouring to veil its light from streaming into the waters below, and revealing the robeless loveliness of the nymph Egeria, rising from it, with her finger on her lips, and looking timidly up to the radiance of her betrayed mistress. Alfonso's gaze was instantly fixed by the certainty which he felt that the statue whose beauties were thus lavishly displayed in the polished snow of the marble, was moulded from Lucrezia's exquisite form!—an enthusiasm of devotion to the art, not so surprising in that age of its revival as in our own, in which it has been emulated, but which made Alfonso gnash his teeth in a frenzy of admiration and despair.

The soft effulgence of the lamp reflected in silver from the bosom of the broad basin into which the fountain fell with a perpetual music, and which overflowing its margin streamed through the centre of the cavern over white sand and inlaid pebbles and spars of bright tints, enabled Alfonso to perceive that he was alone in it. Some preparations for a feast indeed were visible, such as wine piled in snow, and some light gilded tables set with brilliant crystals ; a lyre of antique form lay near the fountain ; and Alfonso bitterly noted the many couches of flowery moss, which would indeed have furnished forth fit resting places for the nymphs who were supposed to haunt the cave, and yet whose softness and fragrance those of Cytherea need not have despised.

Forgetting his own earliness, Alfonso instantly concluded, that not expecting the Duke of Romagna for some time, the successor of Egeria had not yet arrived in her beautiful haunt. The thought then struck him that he had the means of ascertaining the reality of his suspicions beyond the cavil of doubt, or fear of disappointment, which was very likely to meet him if he attempted any open satisfaction of his curiosity, now that Lucrezia must be awakened to the danger of detection. At terrible hazard, indeed ! but his resolution was wrought to a kind of frenzy, and he looked round for some means of concealing himself so as to witness the expected interview unseen. The solitude throughout the valley had no doubt been purposely ordained to secure it from such observation ; but at least it assured him that, even in case of detection, he should not be assailed by numbers.

Glaring eagerly around, Alfonso perceived that the rocks of the cavern

were broken at various elevations by little caves and narrow terraces of rock, blooming with flowers or shadowed with drooping foliage, all in profuse blossom, which were reached by playful zigzags irregularly cut as if to mock the efforts of a climber. But the diversion of mounting them seemed seldom used, for the musk which covered them was untrodden, and in many places briar-roses and jasmine had so twisted over, that the rural nymphs themselves would have had some difficulty in mounting even to rob a bee-hive, or to regain a fugitive dove. But the Hospitaller was of sturdier make, and besides gave himself no time for deliberation, for selecting one of the higher ledges, in which yawned a spar-glittering cave, and which was thrown into shadow by a profusion of laurels in their full purple flowers, at some distance from the fountain, but commanding a view of the whole interior of the grotto, he tore rather than clambered his way up to it. Heedless of the possibility of finding some inhospitable denizens in the cave, he couched down in it on a bed of iris and basil, whose sweetnes vainly wooed his notice, into which he thrust his limbs, peering out like a wild animal from its haunt, and with feelings little less ferocious. Remembering that his white hood might attract notice, he pushed it back, and drew his hair as much as possible over his face, so that there was little probability that he could be discerned in the deep shadow.

Some time elapsed, during which not a sound but the throbings of his own heart met the Hospitaller's strained sense: but anon he thought he heard a distant murmur of female voices, mingled with the light, brilliant laughter of the sex—that flame on the straw of their flimsy fantasies, kindled and gone! But it died away almost immediately; and after a considerable pause of expectation, Alfonso was about to indulge himself with a full inhalation into his half-smothered chest, when he distinguished a soft and rapid footfall approaching. The step seemed somewhat to hesitate on entering the grotto, but as if re-assured by the silence, a female form glided in.

The grace and lightness of her movement, and the rounded beauty of the figure, convinced Alfonso that he beheld the ballerina, although she had changed her costume to one purely Grecian, the loose robes of which, of some shimmering and exquisitely fine tissue of silk, of the most delicate tints of the sky-colours in a sea-shell floated round her, scarcely confined by the coral clasps on her fair shoulders and her cincture of glistering mother-of-pearl, leaving the arms and feet bare, except where the latter were sandalled with silver. Alfonso remarked the golden hue of her now loosened hair, which was ornamented with a wreath of small crimson water flowers common in Italy, twisted with the glossy green leaves and white aromatic flower of the myrtle: but still, to Alfonso's surprise and vexation, she wore a mask, the relentless cardinal melon!—in all other appearances as lovely a naiad as ever bedecked her beauty in the mirror of her native fountain.

After satisfying herself, apparently by a glance round the grotto, that none but her fair self was in it, the ballerina approached the fountain, sat down on its margin—sighed—took up her lyre, played a few wavering, pettish notes—threw it aside—and finished as women always do on like occasions, by endeavouring to ascertain how she looked in the watery glass beside her. Another timid listening—and she drew off her mask! The countenance blooming with the loveliest tints of youth and beauty, now heightened with the glow of agitated passions, could belong to none but Lucrezia Borgia!—And she it was.

But for the dire circumstances of the assignation which had brought this proof before him, Alfonso's delight would have been extreme to discover that she could not possibly be identical with the licentious Fairy Morgana. Now it added only a new bitterness to his cup of wormwood. And yet—as if the daughter of the Borgias had been aware of the fuel she was heaping on fire, and took her revenge with the metaphysical cruelty of her sex and nation, not satisfied with the survey of her charming face, something in the posure of her robes seemed to displease her, and she unclasped the neck, and leisurely arranged her white cobweb-fine linen round her bosom—fair as the tints of a blush rose with its coral buds peeping among the fragrant whiteness. So perfect it was that even her own beauty seemed to delight herself, or the vague deliciousness of love made all things lovely alluring, or its superior coolness made it pleasant,—but she leaned her warm cheek on her shoulder, fondling them together as Venus might her doves,—lightly kissed one wave-like heaving of its moony neighbour, and then laughed, tenderly and sweetly, and yet with a playful derision, as if she were mocking some unseen lover (and was she not?) as she fastened the vest.

Her attitude now—as she sat with the mask in her hand, impatiently listening—was only a new variation of beauty, in the graceful contour into which the gesture threw her head and pliant limbs, which Phidias himself could but have imitated. Then her glance fell on the mask—and she slapped its hideous visage with the disdain of beauty, then seemed to be striving to make it prettier by rubbing and smoothening some of its asperities—then she dipped her hand in the fountain and wrote in its waters a name—Alfonso could not discern what, but doubted not that it was Cæsar.—then in a renewed fit of impatience and playfulness she heaped abundant showers on the statue of herself—so unclad in the fountain, as if Love had taught her his divinest mystery of modesty. She listened again, and Alfonso thought he could discern the beatings of her heart through her aerial robe;—a bird chirruped, and she started up, her face flushing a bright crimson—silence followed—and she turned with a species of scorn and haughtiness from the undarkened threshold. Another pause, and, as if overcome by impatience, she moved rapidly from the fountain to the entrance of the grotto, and looked forth. To Alfonso's deep satisfaction she returned disappointedly, sat down on one of the mossy couches, and played for a moment with her thick waving ringlets:—then she covered her eyes with her hand, and then—like a pettish thing as she was, and unaccustomed to the least thwarting—a shower of tears bedewed her cheek—were dried indignantly away,—and she sunk languidly down on the verdant couch, as if quite vanquished by the weariness of expectation. There was some little rest thus, joining her soft hands and circling her arms over her head; but the inquietude of passion returned; she kissed the misnamed heart's-ease and mignonette of her pillow with vague rapture—started up, gathered a nosegay of the poor flowers, covered them with kisses, and pressed them with devouring tenderness to her lips and bosom,—then threw them disdainfully away. Another April shower—another restless rest—and then with a tumultuous blush she sprang up from the couch. Footsteps were audible, and in an instant she had covered her face with the mask—regained the fountain—and sat on its margin apparently as calm and passionless as the statue in its waves.

There was something of madness in the mingling of emotions with

which Alfonso watched these irrefragable signs of kindled passion—these preparations for the reception of his monstrous rival! He who approached came stealthily as a leopard, but his footfall was sufficiently audible to the lady, who, however, looked not in the direction, and began to murmur a little melody, so that but for the throbbing of her bosom it could not have been thought that she noticed it. The figure of a cavalier, very splendidly garbed and masked, appeared at the entrance of the grotto of Egeria, and paused for an instant as if to survey the interior; and his figure, which largely partook of the beauty and elegance of his race, but above all, the demoniac glitter of his eyes, as his gaze fell on that of the ballerina, informed Alfonso that he beheld the Duke of Romagna.

It was a moment of almost mortal agony in the heart of the prince, and clutching his dagger, and closing his eyes, he drew himself up with all but the resolution to rush forth, and rid Italy and humanity of a monster who but usurped its form—when his purpose was checked by hearing a faint exclamation, almost amounting to a stifled shriek, from the ballerina. Alfonso's heart stood still with excess of emotion as he opened his eyes, and saw that the nymph seemed struggling to free her hand from the grasp in which Cæsar held it in both of his own, kneeling at her feet, and muttering excuses in a most lover-like and dulcet tone, as if deprecating her displeasure.

“ ‘Tis false—’tis false, cavalier!—I await no one—or but my mistress, Donna Lucrezia!—who indeed will be here upon the instant!” exclaimed the ballerina, in a terrified and even horror-struck tone. “ Begone, begone! We are not so lonely as you think!—these gardens swarm with my friends!—I would not that any should find you here, for all I own or hope on earth or in heaven!”

“ Tush, tush, my fairest unknown!—What then when I tell thee that I heard thy beldame whisper thy laggard love—the Knight of St. John?—heard him refuse thy gentle invitation with loathing and abhorrence—pucker-browed monk as he is!—and bethought myself to come in his place;—for the bold in love are favoured by Venus for the sake of her valiant lover, the god of war!” returned Cæsar.

“ Refused!—loathing!—abhorrence!”—exclaimed the ballerina, in a half-stifled voice. “ It is impossible!—and yet it is?—Why then, why then,—I am glad—my soul is glad—since he despairs all women, not me alone!—I meant not that!—My mistress, Donna Lucrezia—ye have all seen how he despised and scorned her!—desired but to learn, that she might revenge—planned a merry scoff—I, her handmaiden, what could I but obey?”

“ Ay, but she will do like great kings detected in base policies—deny her emissary,” replied Cæsar, in a strange tone, which mingled something of mad ferocity with its eagerness. “ And I tell thee—if thou but dare again to soil her dignity with such an imputed share in thy offence—I will trumpet thy shame to all the world—to Rome, to the court, to the pontiff, to all Christendom—how being a woman, forsooth, a lady!—thou hast not blushed to disguise thyself as a harlot—to use all the blandishments of one—to win an unwilling stranger to thine arms!—Will not such a tale renown thee farther even than the dark supposal against thy mistress, Lucrezia—albeit that hath spread to every land like night?—Nay, they will believe yet worse of her, seeing what her handmaids are!—But do not shudder, nor meditate aught frantical, thou fairest of all Eve's daughters!—I mean not to pry into thy mask! But thou shalt not

waste thy beauty and this loving hour because contemned by yonder clod of frosted clay!"

"Thou shalt not need to pry beneath my mask—behold, here is my face!" interrupted the ballerina, with a laugh of unutterable scorn and fury, and tearing off her mask, her features were visible, the eyes flaming, and her whole visage alight with passions the more terrible from the contrast of their fierceness with its beauty.

"Cæsar!—thou knowest me now! Depart, if thou wouldest not have me summon my court and guards, as with the least utterance I can!" she exclaimed, as the duke, feigning great astonishment, started up and retired several paces. "Go—I defy thee!—go with thy tale to whom or what thou wilt—or, to disprove it, 'tis enough that all this valley is filled with concealed troops of my friends, invited by me,—that here, and almost at this hour, I have consented to receive the serenade of Paolo Orsino! So thou seest, subtle as they are, thy spies are at times at fault, and that a woman—fools and toys of caprice as thou deemest, us;—but no, no, no!—I will believe thee!—thou art undeceived—I am myself—begone!"

"So, then, our fair sister, who finds such fault with the world for gossipry—really and verily is here on a rendezvous with a Knight of St. John?" said Cæsar, laughing with inexpressible bitterness.

"What if it be so?—what right hast thou to dispute my pleasure?" returned Lucrezia, passionately. "Art thou husband or father—and for brother—*brother*?—Oh, if thou rememberest, monster!—thou hast affirmed to me that thou art not my brother—a changeling at nurse—as would to God thou wert, that thy neck might feel the edge of the axe it hath deserved by out-deserving a million times!"

"I was mad once—delirious with the fever of my toils to raise our name to the grandeur which now environs it—and raved—and my sister reproaches me with my sufferings!" said the Duke, in a tone compounded of anger, fear, and feigned contrition.

"Ah, Cæsar!—would I coul believe thee!" she replied, with a wild gush of tears; but after a moment's pause adding, in a milder tone, "but yes, yes, I will believe it; I must believe it, or madden too!—Only begone now, for if this knight should come—not for a thousand worlds would I have it known to him that—that I am Lucrezia Borgia!"

Thus far had the Hospitaller listened with a fluctuation of anxiety, doubt, joy, and ultimate triumph to this involuntary and irresistible evidence of Lucrezia's innocence on one tremendous point—and so absorbingly that he scarcely breathed:—but suddenly the whole bright fabric which had already risen from the ruins of this accusation was dashed to pieces.

"Art thou not more fearful that father Saturn may hear of it, Lucretia nostra?" Cæsar replied, with a withering, livid smile, of which only himself and the fiend he served seemed capable. "Ancient fable—and modern history—show us that in his jealousies or fears for the supremacy he hath not paused to devour his own flesh! Remember Francesco's doom, whom you loved so well!—and do not bid *me* tremble—but for thy minion, tremble thou!"

"Oh, thou—what can I call thee! What if I told thy sire—but how could I accuse thee? The devils themselves know no names for thy crimes!" said Lucrezia, gaspingly.

"Accuse me to him!—doubtless thou canst wield the thunder as thou wilt!—the cestus of thine unimaginable beauty has given thee sovereignty

over our earthly Jove!" replied Cæsar, with exceeding fierceness. "Let him cast another son into the gory grave of him who—died so suddenly in the—who knows where!—dost thou? Or of him—thy husband—who, when the assassins failed on the steps of St. Peter—was cured of all his suspicions and jealousies under the paternal roof, in the Vatican!"

"I will not call thee any monster—I know none that thou art!" said Lucrezia, resuming a singular calmness. "But hearken to me, at least, in this matter:—dost thou hear me, Cæsar, Duke of Romagna?—I dared not tell my own heart—no, nor the heavens themselves—I dared not believe—why I thought that in these horrors thou wert not so ignorant as the merciless steel that wrought them! But,—listen to me!—if but one hair of my noble deliverer's head be harmed—rest thou assured that I will live only to avenge it—and that I shall be at no loss to tell what hand hath struck the blow, though it be by the murkiest midnight that ever covered thy most damned enterprise!"

"I know thy vengeance—but, Lucretia nostra! I shall not perish so dove-like as my predecessors—I am no dumb fish, to die without a shriek, with a gasp!" said Cæsar, fiercely, and yet with a mixture of sarcastic levity. "Ere I make my shamble from the scene I will confess—not only mine own offences, but all that Italy imputes to your grace! Of a surety, posterity will deem me a likely witness—and humanity cannot doubt it when they hear that Death stood by, the scrivener of my harangue! Thou knowest not what I am!—but this I will do, if thy vengeance—as thou callest thy woman's pecking—force me to it."

"They will call thee a madman—as thou art—humanity cannot believe it!" replied Lucrezia, in a thunderstruck and wavering manner, as if her own mind were reeling under too mighty a weight of anguish. "Nay, perchance, with the springs of thy direful existence would be exhausted those of mine ignominy! And he who first gave the sound forth might perish with its last echo on his lips?—Humanity cannot believe it."

"No?—and how, I pray thee, did this towering iceberg thou woost look,—when your sire honoured us all by kissing you to our faces?" said the merciless Borgia, skilled in the finest nerves of mental agony.

"He looked—as I would have had him look, believing thy measureless lies!—for yes, yes, they are thine! Never till that hour—when thou didst reveal thyself to be the fiend—had calumny herself breathed evil word of me!" said Lucrezia, distractedly; but perhaps struck with a dark change in Cæsar's countenance, she continued almost imploringly—"But, no,—perchance I am harsh now—it is my evil fate alone!—yet let me not drag more victims into its whirl. What shall I do then? Hate my father—refuse him the only love which yet remains to comfort his lonely age!—The only pure light beaming peace on the troubled tempests of his conscience, himself hath told me! Liars of the earth, lie on!—it shall not be! And let whoso believes these things against me on no other proof than invented murmurs—a licentious poet's written vipers—a base populace's belief—a daughter's love for a most loving and lavishly indulgent father!—let him be judged and condemned by the like! He hath recognized the tribunal!"

"Thou hast uttered a malediction on thy tall Hospitaller—whereto most clerkly, sweet abbot, I chaunt—Amen!" replied Cæsar, with a ludicrous imitation of the careless nasal tone in which such functionaries often deliver their responses. "No doubt, since thy fearful, gentle sex delight only in sinewy ferocities, thou deemest him a very lion of courage

—dost applaud him in thy tender soul for the only man-slayer! doth it not? Ha, ha, but he dares not venture into Lucrezia's den!"

An involuntary movement of the concealed knight at this imputation on his courage, stirred one of the laurels against which he pressed in his eagerness; but excited no attention beyond a single instant's pause in the dialogue.

" He dares—but he will not!—thou canst not cheat me of this comfort at least;—he despises all women, not me alone!" returned Lucrezia, vehemently.

" But I will cheat thee of that comfort, thou fair wretch!—and disprove thy lies, black duke!" muttered Alfonso, in the depths of his soul.

" He will not come, I tell thee—he hath other sheep to mind!" returned Cæsar, with triumphant bitterness. " I had him too well watched not to know that a certain Morgan le Fay—whom doubtless you also beheld, blazing it—and whose acquaintance I too can boast—has invited him to sup with her to-night."

" If this be true—why then—what is it to me?—O, Holy Mary! how often hast thou moved me to thy sweet dedication; and this perchance is but a harsher call!" exclaimed Lucrezia, with such passionate grief that Alfonso was at once touched with pity, indignant at Cæsar's falsehood, and at the same time struck by the coincidence with a dim thought that perhaps Lucrezia had some reason in declaring that she was calumniated—and by his agency.

" What!—our youthful widow, scarcely in her twentieth spring—Lucrezia Borgia—a nun!" said Cæsar, with a contemptuous laugh. " They ornament death with flowers—but of the colder sort—lilies and violets and dank wall-flowers. But if it be true ye are scandalled, wherefore do ye confirm loose talk by this Roman marriage, when one in distant Ferrara would choke the very life-breath of calumny?"

" The Prince of Ferrara disdains to mingle the unstained honours of his ancestry with the shame of that pollution thou callest thy sister, Cæsar!" retorted the lady, as if rejoicing to be able to make her reply so stinging, though she herself shared the venom.

" For which some day I will cut his throat, and make him prince of all the carrion-flies that can find him on a dunghill!" said Cæsar, with extreme fierceness. " But thou protest, our Lucrezia!—or if thou wert sincere it were easy enough for thee—since thou seest he will not love—to knit policies with this man of Ferrara, and persuade him to renew the chatter about weddings with the proud wittol his lord;—for all men have a handle, if not in one vice, in another—and his may be ambition."

Lucrezia was silent, and Alfonso bitterly concluded that she was ruminating on the feasibility of such a project; and almost frenzied with wrath and indignation, he might perhaps have made some violent outbreak, if the hopes of a sweeter and subtler vengeance had not restrained him.

Very cautiously at first, he imitated with his hands the sound of remote footsteps, and he had the satisfaction to hear Lucrezia exclaim—" He comes, he comes! I swear to thee, Cæsar, I did but intend to play him a merry rebuke for his scorn of me, which thyself may witness! But if he comes and finds thee here—something desperate I must needs do!"

Cæsar laughed scornfully. " He will not come," he said. " the sage will not—the coward dares not! Moreover, if 'tis he, and I pass him in this thwart light, he will as plainly discern me as the sun in an eclipse."

" It needs not," said Lucrezia, beseechingly. " Retire into yonder

archway of ivy—thou shalt hear all that passes;—but I had promised he should see me without a mask—and I meant to keep the word to its sound by wearing only that of darkness so long as to fulfil my pledge—and this lamp hath a mystery in it invented by a rare artist of Florence.”

“ Ha, ha!—didst thou in very truth? He will not come—thy muffled she-Mercury will tell thee how vainly she besought him—but I will witness this trick of thine for a divertissement;” and still laughing gloomily, the duke strode to the archway indicated by Lucrezia, which was at some distance from the fountain, in the rocks, and raising the tapestry of ivy which almost concealed it, he retired within.

Alfonso stirred the laurels among which he was ensconced, and Lucrezia, satisfied that some one was approaching, touched an un-seen spring, and suddenly the Cupids around the artificial moon, expanding their wings by a marvellously ingenious machinery, closed up every ray of light, and the grotto of Egeria was in complete darkness. The Hospitaller seized his opportunity, glided out of his concealment, and easily reached the ground. He hesitated slightly, fearing lest she should observe that he did not make his entry at the portal; but as if ascribing the pause to apprehension of some treachery in the arrivant, the ballerina began warbling like a nightingale luring its mate, and full as tremulously—

“ Come, love!—I'll teach thee
How 'tis to love:—
And fear not 'twill harm thee,
I learned from a dove.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ Love is a species of melancholy, and a necessary part of this my treatise, which I may not omit; *operi suscepto inseri iendum fuit*; so Jacobus Mysilius pleadeth for himself in his translation of Lucian's dialogues, and so do I; I must and will perform my task.”—*Anatomie of Melancholy*.

Alfonso could no longer doubt that Lucrezia had been betrayed by her emissary to the duke, and that consequently the solitude, the adornment, the tears, the passionate pantomime he had witnessed—were all for him! These were perilous recollections to bear with him in the part which he had resolved to play, more especially as he concluded Lucrezia's assurances that she was surrounded by an unseen court, were only inventions to cajole or intimidate her unwelcome visitant.

Guided by the warm moonlight at the entrance of the grotto, Alfonso groped his way to it; then turned, and seemed as if entering from the exterior, though somewhat suddenly. He was continuing his advance with a firm step towards the fountain, which slightly gleamed even in the darkness, when the ballerina ceased her lure. “ Sir cavalier,” she said, in her clear, flute-like tones, “ methinks you are now as near as reverent worshippers are wont to approach to my waves, though, as one of Dian's knights, the vestal nymphs of these caves bid you very welcome.”

“ Methinks the vestal nymphs must long since have departed, since here Lucrezia Borgia is worshipped as of old the Queen of Paphos!” said the knight, irresolutely pausing.

"What doth a Knight of holy John then in such a bower?" replied the ballerina. "But, remember, Knight of St. John, I have kept mine oath, for I speak to thee now unmasked."

"Unmasked!—when darkness hides you as affectually as a mountain from my gaze," returned Alfonso, with an agitation which almost betrayed itself in his wavering voice.

"I have kept my faith to the letter—what more ask you of a woman, and an attendant on Lucrezia Borgia?" said the ballerina, with forced vivacity. "But I heard thou wert affrighted—didst not dare to come—lest the Sicilian dancer should prove to be the fiend like her who tempted Cyprian? And these fears redouble in darkness; we will have light."

And almost simultaneously the Cupids withdrew their wings, and the light streamed over the scene, revealing the nymph of Egeria seated on the brink of her fountain, once more masked.

"I deceived thy messenger—no ill precaution, lest ill should be plotted," returned the Hospitaller, collecting all his firmness, and hurrying to make the offence he meditated irreparable at once. "I feared thee not, since I suspected—and thy deception now adds proof—that thou wert a viler thing than Cyprian's devil—a licentious woman! Or, to say the worst at once, Lucrezia Borgia herself!—and yet I am here. But hearken to what purpose, and if thou art that spot on all her sex, on all humanity, and for ever!—something it may kindle thee to shame and repentance that have so falsified nature's brightest mintage, matching so precious an outward show with baseness so intrinsic! Something it may serve to convince thee that there are breasts in which—that thy licentious love can kindle no answering flame in any but hearts as sulphuric with foul passions! I am here but to receive confirmation of thine infamy by gazing at it with mine own eyes. I am in Rome itself, only to obtain such evidence, to justify Alfonso of Ferrara in his refusal to mingle the purple of his royal blood with so contaminate a stream!"

Alfonso thought he distinguished an irrepressible exclamation of triumph from the ivy archway; but Lucrezia made no reply, gazing from her mask as if turned to stone. There was a pause of utter silence, lasting several moments.

"Knight,—but you rave! You dared not utter sounds like these to the Lucrezia of whom you speak, and who I am not, I swear to you by all the saints above the golden stars!" she replied at length with bewildered vehemence. "And for the ducal churl, thy sender, return and tell him—nay, tarry but a short time longer in Rome, and thou shalt return to rid him of all fear by bearing the tidings of Lucrezia's marriage with the heir of the Orsibi."

This was a form of vengeance and pride on which Alfonso had not calculated, so womanly it was; and she spoke the words with a passionate fierceness which showed that the Borgian fire glowed even in her rosy blood.

"Nay, then, if thou art not Lucrezia, let me behold thy face even as thou didst swear to me," he returned, much more mildly. "Oh, could I think indeed that there was another woman in the world so like—and so unlike her, as I would find thee!—an innocent Lucrezia!—but none but Lucrezia melts language into music—none but Lucrezia breathes encircled with the air of paradise!"

"It is then true that—you hate not all womankind, but only Lucrezia

Borgia?" returned the ballerina, in a mollified and even not ungratified tone.

"Wert thou any other, I would answer by loving thee more than all womankind hath been or shall be loved by man when the last day sums up all time!" returned Alfonso, somewhat too warmly, certes, for his part.

"Were I Lucrezia—the terrible, death-dealing Lucrezia Borgia of whom thou speakest—dost thou think I would listen to thee thus—I will not belie my thought—delightedly," replied the ballerina, playfully, and yet with a deep sigh. "Rail on against her; 'tis nought to me—or rather, it is pleasant, being my rival, it seems, in your saintly liking—were she any other than herself. Ah, indeed, but it crowns my glory in having obtained so virtuous a society in this place, to know that my unseen beauties have won the victory over charms which—I have heard men praise, perchance, that lacked judgment. I pray you, knight, give my vanity the triumph to know when and where that proud lady has woed you so closely that you are driven so desperately on your defences? Our Lady witness! though one of a gossiping company, I had not heard that Madama Lucrezia was reduced to such straits."

Again the Hospitaller was foiled, for he felt that, without displaying a coxcombry alien to his nature, he could not allege any proof in support of his insinuations, since the ballerina persisted in denying her identity. But his subtle intellect, rapid in combinations, suggested a master-stroke.

"Thy question would have remained unasked, if thou hadst heard her speeches to me in this day's carnival, disguised as Fata Morgana," he replied. "The sprightliest woor of our sex—Ovid himself—might have learned something from her."

"Nay, now, indeed thou beliest her, knight!—some witchcraft has deceived thee," said the ballerina, hurriedly.

"And so did I hope—misdoubt—when I beheld thee playing thy sorceries as the ballerina, and dreamed thou wert Lucrezia!" replied the Hospitaller. "But since thou art *not* Lucrezia, the lascivious Fairy Queen, no doubt, was the lady who bears that much wronged name."

"Nay, knight, I will be just even to my rival!—I have told you I am an attendant on Donna Lucrezia, and I declare to you that Morgan le Fay was enacted by her this day, even as much as by me!—and thou mayst remember her procession passed while we were at parle at the Capitol," said the ballerina.

"Nay, then, if thou art of her so nigh attendance, and dislikest me not—thou art the very sphinx to unravel me my riddles," returned the Hospitaller.

"But, holy knight! is it religious to win vassals to traduce their lords?" said the ballerina, with an audible falter of the voice.

"And so thou dost acknowledge that to speak the truth of Lucrezia is to speak evil?" retorted the knight.

"Go on, go on; speak plainly, and I will answer so—but indeed you trap me with these indirections," said the ballerina. "I am a woman—thou art half a priest—both fond of scandal, some have it; therefore ask what thou wilt, and to the compass of my knowledge I will answer with the truth."

"Tis well minded;—you are a woman—therefore swear by some oath, if there be any which women keep, that at least thou wilt not betray the trust I repose in you!" said the Hospitaller.

"Trust me not, trust me not—if thou hast aught to say which the most dreadful of the Borgias may not hear!" exclaimed the ballerina, with an intensity of alarm which Alfonso saw, but feigned not to observe.

"How else I know not any means to accomplish my errand," he said, with a strong effort to hinder his voice from faltering. "Proofs—proofs of her guilt!"

"What need of proofs when the world is judging a woman?" replied the ballerina, with a bitterness foreign to her usual tones. "Speak on; what am I to answer?—for indeed you have me on the rack!"

"Lady, then—placed as you are so near Lucrezia's person—you must be able to tell me whether she is innocent or guilty?" replied Alfonso, with some scarcely observable hesitation.

"Innocent or guilty!—of what?—I tell you again, sir knight, I am no sphinx, therefore deal not with me in enigmas!" she exclaimed, breathing short as if with strong emotion.

"Nay, I will indeed remember that you are a woman;—I may not speak more plainly.—But, lady, you cannot be ignorant of what whispers, universal as the wind, discourse concerning the hideous beauty your mistress!" said Alfonso, not without a pang of remorse. "But yet—understand me when I say it—that if your service is of three years' standing with Donna Lucrezia—can you give me no inkling of *where* the Duke of Gandia was slain, by whose hand, and for what cause!"

"I would give my dearest heart's blood—I mean, my lady hath often said so—but she is a devil, we know,—to learn!" replied the ballerina.

"But can it be that neither you nor any of that too beautiful lady's attendance had any suspicions?" said Alfonso.

"Yours should teach us how baseless such may be!" replied the lady, with a stifled sigh, but carefully noted by her inquisitor.

"And therefore do I seek certainties.—Remember you, lady, of the night when the young duke perished?" pursued he.

"Oh, in very truth, I forget it not! But you are discoursing dangerous matters in this air!" said the ballerina, with a fugitive glance at the ivy archway.

"Nay, damsel, I trust we need not fear to be overheard by Francesco's murderers in this haunt of his kinsfolk," he continued. "You remember him, then? He was a fair youth, if men report the truth."

"Oh, holy Mother of mercy!—Francesco!" was all the ballerina could reply, choked by the bitterness of the recollections which arose in her heart.

"And loved to glass his goodly form in women's eyes—wherefore I may apprehend a reason for that passion which holds you. Your beauty, lady, moves me to think that perchance the blooming and amorous cavalier was wont to address some portion of his vows to you?"

"As a most dear brother I loved him—as a faithful friend—as one whose bright and generous spirit—whose courage and love—but he is gone! To pray hourly for the justice due on his unknown murderers is all that even his fond father and loved sister can now perform."

"Loved!—ay, perchance *too well?*" said the knight; and although the drift of his questioning could scarcely have escaped her perception, the lady started as if she had till then forgotten it in those tragical recollections. The sagacious inquirer noted this to her advantage, that it seemed like a shock to the current of her ideas, and therefore by possibility flowed not from the common source which guilt would offer.

"Too well!—all that I have heard of their affection I will tell you," she said, after a pause. "They were so like in person that, but for the difference of sex and some few years, never was resemblance closer; and in their natures (deem what thou wilt of it!) there was that sweet and musical concord which in two instruments is harmony—in souls love as spiritual and as pure! And if the fierce and intractable temper of a brother strengthened this alliance of love into one also of policy—and his envious carpings have been thus blackly interpreted—Heaven grant it was not his intent as well as deed!"

"Soh!—fair one, thou shouldst have worn a lawyer's gown to make the science musical!" said the Hospitaller. "But since you remember that direful night—were you with Lucrezia on it?"

"I was, and we were in the convent of the blessed sisters of Santa Maria Transtevere!" replied the ballerina, with a convulsive shudder.

"How chanced it she was there on a night in which the solemn feast was given to celebrate the departure of the cardinal—now Duke of Romagna—her brother, to present the crown of Naples to Don Federigo?" said the knight, not without a deep satisfaction mingling with his hopelessness of a satisfactory solution, at the discomfiture of the listener.

"Lucrezia and the cardinal had—had quarrelled on a matter which, if I remember rightly—nay, it was a foolish quarrel—a word—a nothing!" she exclaimed, starting at a slight stir in the ivy.

Foiled by this circumstance, still Alfonso was not displeased to remark the emotion of the unseen auditor.

"Concluding, then, that Francesco perished by the hand of some secret rival—who might it be that, under the roof of the Vatican itself, strangled the Prince of Salerno in his bed?" said Alfonso, with mingled severity and gloom.

"It is false, most false!—who is it says this horror is true?" said the ballerina, wildly. "The Prince of Salerno perished of the wounds he received in the square of St. Peter, from enemies whom his own rashness and arrogance had provoked."

"The story sounded not so in Ferrara—it was there averred that he was recovering so fast of his wounds that the time was almost gone to pretend with any decency that he died of them, though humanity is of a marvellous chemistry," replied the knight. "We heard, too, of a strange scene which preceded his destruction—when she debarred him her very presence—when he forced his way to it by violence—and she fled to her father, and for hours refused even to look at her husband, clinging to the pontiff, and hiding her face in his robes, while he, forsooth, preached duty and a wife's submission!—And won her at length to consent to a return to it within a month; but meanwhile death spread his snares in secret, and caught the unhappy youth exulting in his fool's paradise of hope, on the very day of the promised fulfilment, on the steps of the pontifical palace—if thou wilst!"

"Oh, but you know not all—indeed you know not all!" returned the ballerina, desperately. "She married him against her will—moved only by the supplications of that father!—bethink you! the vicar of Heaven, a father, supplicating—wherefore so earnest, then—Lucrezia but slightly misdoubted. I know not why—it might be because she loved not the effeminate Lord of Pesaro—yet I know not wherefore the ferocious boy of Salerno was chosen, whose brutish excesses of—love, thou wilt call it, being a man—whose sensual madness—once suffered, infused such indig-

nation, loathing, terror, that—but whatever was done, was prompted and sanctioned by a man whose holiness makes all his utterances oracles of Heaven!"

"Fra Bruno!" returned the Hospitaller with a start. "He also who procured the divorce of the Lord of Pesaro?"

"The Lord of Pesaro—was divorced by a decree of the church!" said the ballerina, covering her mask with her hands, and speaking in a low, panting, shamestruck tone, as if nearly exhausted by the length and severity of the scrutiny, and yet unwilling to abandon any hope of dissipating the evil impressions of the scrutinizer. "Nay, more!—I will avow a secret which shall put me as much in thy power, as thy questionings do thee in mine! A secret of Lucrezia Borgia's!—thou hast heard what Fra Bruno said of this Ursine marriage? But thou knowest not that he hath infused scruples into Lucrezia relating to the lawfulness of the dissolution of her first betrothal, albeit to one whom she never saw! And that therefore any subsequent marriage were but disguised adultery!"

"Tut, tut, lady, you jest with me!—The daughter of the supreme head of the church entertain doubts of his power to dissolve all contracts, earthly—ay, even heavenly?" returned the knight. "And who can believe that such a phantasy divorced Pesaro, when it prevented not the marriage with him whom thou hast called a 'feroci us boy'?"

"Heaven forgive me, since he is gone!" said the ballerina, melting into tears. "I said not so—but, knight, thou knowest not—nay, who can tell the motives of that change?—What if in the absence of that powerful spirit on which she leaned,—impelled by irresistible circumstances,—ay, even by a womanly passion for that fair fame which you hold to be extinct in her breast—but what avail words?—Deem, if thou wilt, that she married the violent prince to murder him—since murder is her habitual and favourite pastime!"

"Lady, if we acquit her—more darkly fall our suspicions on the unknown rival who sometimes uses the keys of St. Peter—at others the dagger of the assassin—to set her free—or rather to clutch her away from the arms to which he had unwillingly resigned her, to deceive the world's suspicion or cajole it into doubt!"

"And this unknown!—you speak as if he were not unknown to you!—Knight, if you be a man, speak out and fairly, for indeed these fiendish hints torture me nigh to madness!" exclaimed the ballerina, starting up with frenzied impatience, but almost instantly resuming her seat as if in exhaustion, and faintly adding, "I pray you, in mercy, tell me who this unknown may be, in your suspicions?"

"Nay, lady—bid me not answer by aught but silence!—yet perchance the spectre that must needs haunt Salerno's chambers in the Vatican, could reply!" said the unrelenting Hospitaller.

"Wilt thou interrogate it, then, and thou shalt have lodging in them?" replied the ballerina, with a wild laugh. "Lucrezia at least fears not whatever it may reveal!"

"Let me do the phantom's office, then!—why, who is it that is so bent on wedding Lucrezia to the heir of the Orsini—that she may be fixed in Rome—against every maxim of policy?" replied Alfonso, giving way to the bitterness which possessed his soul.

"Truly!—I know not that: so powerful a race only can balance—I know not what I say!" exclaimed the ballerina, in a voice whose despair went to the heart of Alfonso. "Blessed Virgin!—truly art thou Lucrezia's

only refuge, since even this renewed sacrifice avails only to strengthen the dire phantasy it would destroy!—thou cruel man of Ferrara! thine own dark errand hither might have better instructed thee—for if Lucrezia must remain in Rome, Lucrezia had not been offered to Ferrara!—and Ferrara need not basely have sought the means to traduce her in it!—Nay, I will keep your counsel; fear not. Only those who love Lucrezia, need fear!—and I blame you not for your hatred of her, believing thus, for methinks I should abhor the very sun that shone on such a wretch! Return to your harsh land, and win what reward you may by telling your master that one who should know best—one who has known Lucrezia since she knew herself—admitted all the worst that you could say against her, as truths which only angels from heaven can disprove!"

Much but secretly affected at the blank desperation of this avowal, Alfonso made a few irresolute movements, but no reply, until he was nigh vanquished by observing how fast tears rained from her eyes into the fountain, over which she bent to conceal the agony of her grief.

"It is enough—this confession suffices!" he said, approaching, though with hesitation, and raising her hand to his lips. "But for yourself, lady, your generous advocacy even of so evil a cause persuades me that you are worthy of a true friendship!"

She drew the hand from him instantly, and with a kind of delirious gaiety wrote the word "**FRIENDSHIP**" rapidly on the waters of the fountain.

"Look!—scarcely a ripple remains! That is the end!" she said, laughing with wonderful bitterness. "Let us add but another word—farewell!—and let the trace it shall leave tell when we shall meet again!"

Something the Hospitaller meant to say, but the words died on his lips; but seating himself beside her on the fountain margin, he gazed with mingled sadness and passion on the lovely form of the ballerina, heaving with the emotion which she endeavoured to conceal.

"We will not part thus—enemies!" he said at length with increasing emotion, and scarcely knowing what he did say. "Those lips whose roses are blossoming fire—to make my nature divine too—nay!—let me but behold thy face, or prove, prove that thou art *not* Lucrezia, and I will worship thee!"

"Yes, I will prove it, assuredly I will prove it; but touch not my mask, as thou art a knight and a man!" exclaimed the ballerina, starting up in terror as Alfonso, finding his resolutions reel, seized the mask with the intention of leaving himself by the revelation without resource or hope. But at the instant that he drew it off, the light again disappeared at the touch of the invisible spring—and simultaneously the Hospitaller felt his neck encircled as if by the arms of some air-incumbent form, and lips whose velvety sweetness seemed to combine all essences of deliciousness, were pressed breathlessly and glowingly to his own, but for an evanescent instant of sensation, while a voice whispered on them in ripples of music, "Would Lucrezia have so forgiven thee?" Yielding irresistibly to the delirium of his delight, the Hospitaller stretched his arms to clutch the beauteous phantom—but he grasped only empty air!

He rushed forward, and, at the same instant, there arose a wild uproar and tumult all around; the moon of the fountain burst into a blaze of whirling light which illuminated the whole grotto; a shrill, agitated bell was audible, as if from the depths of the fountain; and suddenly the verdant precincts were crowded with a most extraordinary company, shouting, hooting, laughing, yelling, and waving torches around. Satyrs, nymphs,

fauns, and all the varieties of sylvan deities poured out of every nook and cranny by which there was entrance—all shrieking execrations on the profaner of the sacred solitude, and brandishing various weapons appropriate to their qualities. The satyrs wielded their crooked staves, the fauns their stiff pine-wreaths, the nymphs their branches of oak, and all menacingly and with hideous clamour. But by far the most formidable personages of the group were a number of shepherds, with huge boar spears, who made their appearance on every side.

“Pan, Pan!” shouted a hundred voices. “Come and judge the mortal who has dared to profane thy solitudes! Echo, where is Pan?”

Distant, faint, and melodious voices repeated in every direction, “Pan! where is Pan?”

At first Alfonso stood as if rooted to the ground, almost believing himself surrounded by the rural gods in reality, or under the illusion of some strange sorcery. But suddenly the conviction rushed upon him that he was betrayed either to be made the jest of a company of carnival revellers, or perhaps to the vengeance of Lucrezia and her myrmidons for the affronts which he had put upon her. While gazing round in amazement to find himself so completely circled, and hesitating whether to attempt a forcible escape, the shrill shriek of pipes was heard, and attended by a riotous company of satyrs, Pan hobbled into the grotto on his goats’ legs, the satyrs playing a wild march with their oaten reeds.

“Silence!—and where is the guilty nymph who has lured the mortal hither?” shouted the sylvan god.

“Egeria, Egeria!” exclaimed unnumbered accusing voices.

“At thine old tricks again, luring wisdom whither it should least come,” said Pan, severely. “Yes, hide thyself in thy blushing waves!—But the mortal, where is he?”

“Fie, fie, fie!—a Knight of St. John, a Knight of St. John!” exclaimed all the nymphs at once. “Had it been old Silenus now, or one of the satyrs, we had not wondered.”

“The Holy Knight of St. John!” resounded on all sides, amidst a general and outrageous peal of laughter.

“In very truth, ye have the laughing side of the jest, but if ye will confront me with the nymph, I will prove that at least we ought to share the punishment!” said the Hospitaller, endeavouring to make the best of his ludicrous or dangerous position—he scarcely knew which, or whether both.

“And then it will be a pleasure!—No, no, no; bring him along, and our queen shall judge him?” exclaimed the nymphs, and Alfonso beheld himself rapidly hemmed in by the shepherds with their spears.

His doubts seemed now to call for some imperative decision; but while he remembered almost in a mass the dismal legends of Lucrezia’s haunts, his lips still tingled with the honied fire left on them from hers, and it seemed impossible that she could really mean him harm? And yet he stood hesitating, when suddenly a laughing voice saluted him, and the Duke of Romagna made his entry, as if from the valley without, with his vizard in his hand, and a smiling look of welcome.

“Fear nothing, good knight,” he said, “your sentence shall not be too severe!—and suffer these rural folk to lead you before their empress, Donna Lucrezia, who, with me, has devised this carnival jest. Your forfeit shall be light, if you can detect and pacify her damsel who performed the part of Egeria, and who has already rejoined her mistress, unmasked.”

The secret feelings with which Alfonso listened to this beguiling and perfidious statement may be imagined ; but not deserted by his own skill in the conjuncture, he replied in a tone of similar hilarity, “Lead on, since your highness guarantees my safety from the fate of Orpheus ! And if I find the damsel, before you all she shall acknowledge that I accepted her invitation only to read her a sermon which she will not soon forget.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

“ In all my strict inquiries, all the humours
 Which I have drain'd with more than chymist's pains,
 I have not found a temper so complete
 To furnish forth a greatness as my Cæsar's.”—LEE.

Marching like a prisoner of war, surrounded by his shepherd spearmen, Alfonso affected to enter into the spirit of the jest, and suffered himself to be quietly shackled by Pan with ivy, which an effort would snap. The moment he stepped forth in this array from the grotto, the road was beset by a multitude of the most extraordinary phantoms, pelting him with comfits ; the woods around teemed with the wildest forms of Grecian mythology ; statues took life ; every tree yielded its sleeping dryad ; far melodies sounded in every direction ; naiads arose in the stream, and laughingly threw their waters in showers at him ; with a cheerful hunting blast Diana and her nymphs appeared on a rock, and darted at him blunt arrows with gilded heads ; through all which they arrived at an avenue of lofty elms, whose overarching branches, filagreed by the moonlight, resembled the interior of a Gothic cathedral, and formed a natural hall fit for the audience of the rural deities. Beneath these, again, were bosquets of orange trees in full blossom, which diffused an inexpressibly sweet perfume in the air, and cooled the gaze as if their verdure was strewn with snow. The vista terminated in an open semicircular saloon on a somewhat raised terrace of blue marble, richly gilded, and decorated with frescoes ; in the midst of which was a verdant throne. The moon shone fully upon it, with a light like that of a rayless sun, and by the lustre Alfonso discerned that the terrace was thronged with a splendid court, assembled round a lady who occupied the throne, among which the scarlet robes of cardinals, and the continual flashing of jewels, announced personages of high rank.

As the prisoner approached, environed by his grotesque capturers, laughter as inextinguishable as that which shook the gods on a somewhat similar occasion, resounded among the occupants of the terrace. Continuing his enforced advance, Alfonso discerned with amazement that in the brief time which had elapsed, Lucrezia had totally changed her attire, and was now arrayed in a Spanish dress, suitable to her rank, and in the fashion of the time. A boddice of silver tissue confined her perfect shape, with every heave of which sparkled unnumbered jewels ; and a diadem which shone as if with stars, so bright and large were the diamonds in it, flashed on her brow. She looked a queen, resembling only in the vague identity of all forms of beauty, either the vivacious dancer of the Capitol, or the voluptuous nymph of the fountain ; and but for the paleness of her complexion, it was impossible to guess that she had passed though scenes

so exhausting—feelings so passionate—either by her manner or expression, which was proud and stedfastly tranquil.

Alfonso's suspicions were deepened by this wonderful facility of change, which seemed to demonstrate in her faculties of dissimulation much exercised; but expecting the raillery which the supposed relaxation of his principles would occasion, he was troubled to observe among the laughing groups nearly all those who had witnessed his grand display of them in refusing Lucrezia's scarf—the Orsino, Le Beaufort, Bembo and a multitude of others.

The gloom on the Orsino's visage, however, marked but little delight in the frolic, and formed a contrast to Sir Reginald, whose bold, handsome countenance was all alit with mirth and satisfaction. Bembo seemed not to know how to look, but to intend to take his cue from the aspect of his lord; and accordingly he grew solemn and sedate when he perceived Alfonso's stern composure. Indeed the manner became more general, when the courtiers observed that Lucrezia's paleness deepened—her lips trembled—and that when the criminal was placed before her, and Pan recited his accusation, complaining of an attempt to misuse his innocent solitudes, and to misguide one of his chapest nymphs,—instead of the laughing raillery of which she was mistress, and with which all expected she would overwhelm the religious knight who had refused to be her champion—she was silent, and kept her eyes sunk with an expression of shame, and even of an undefined fearfulness.

“Knight! answer, or thou art lost!” exclaimed Cæsar, affecting to clap the Hospitaller encouragingly on the shoulder.

“These charges are too general, signor. Let Pan, if he hath any witnesses of what passed, allege particulars; and, by his crooked staff! those shall acquit me without any other reply,” said Alfonso, in the bitterness of his feelings projecting a stroke which should deal two ways at once. “Thereby shall ye truly discern that I accepted the nymph's invitation—more effectually to convince her that I despised it, taking no advantage either of the solitude or of her unconcealed tenderness, but to read her a more dismal lecture than, I misdoubt, some father confessors would! And when Echo betrayed us to Pan, I grieve to think that it was envy which prompted her to repeat a sound so delicate that the neighbouring nightingales, albeit on the listen, heard it not—when, mark ye all! without any encouragement, wish, or return from me, she pressed her lips,—which yet I own, if they had not touched like flame, from some cedarly sweetness in them, would not have troubled me so much!—to mine, in that form which hath for several ages been known to immortals and men by the style and title of a—kiss! So that, indeed, I have cause to bless Echo, that brought Pan and light to my assistance, or I know not what might have befallen me in the power of a nymph so enterprising!”

General murmurs of applause, mingled with laughter, accompanied this extraordinary defence, during which Lucrezia's countenance flushed so deeply that it was in itself sufficient to betray her to all who had any inklings of the truth; but Cæsar's visage, for an instant, took all the pallid tints which deserted hers, ere it recovered its own.

“This is, indeed, a fearful charge to be brought against a nymph that belongs not to the court of Paphos,” he said. “Dearest Lucrezia! let her be called, and publicly repel this boasting companion's accusal.”

“Not so, not so—since he hath so thanklessly betrayed her to our laughter—it were to shame both,” replied the lady, hastily, without lift-

ing her long eyelashes, and colouring back into paleness like a cloud receding into whiteness as it passes from the sunset. "Not that I believe it altogether for a verity—but we will not labour to prove what, being known, were so little to any satisfaction but that of this chevalier's vanity—which perchance she but intended to make overflow, as we have seen it. Knight, knight, it is not well of thee—if such occurred—to betray this folly, but it is warning to trust thee with none of more blushing avowal." Leaving the rest in surmise, we will only pronounce on thee this punishment, that if thou canst not detect among my retinue, unmasked, her who cajoled you, masked,—your ignorance shall be perpetual."

Alfonso bowed with an air of indifference which he could perceive struck a pang into the lady's heart; but without relenting he stepped aside.

"And now, my Lord Orsino, having adjudged this knotty cause, we are in the humour to listen to your music," she continued, turning to Paolo with a kindness which obviously brightened his expression; and starting up as it were into existence on the word, he left the terrace, and in a few moments appeared beneath it with a retinue of chosen musicians. They commenced immediately in a fine strain of harmony, whose effect beneath the hushed and resplendent skies was inexpressibly delicious. The dreams of Elysium seemed to be realized, and that these were the happy fields in whose atmosphere the delighted spirit was consoled for every woe; and with all his wrath, Alfonso's heart melted in his bosom when he gazed on Lucrezia, and remarked the languor and dejection in her face, and the tears, scarcely repressed, which lurked beneath her eyelids. But the Orsino, who had a rich and tunable voice, disturbed the reverie by a song which he sang in pathetic lamentation over the cruelty of his mistress, all the musicians answering him in set responses like an ancient chorus.

At the conclusion of the lay, the ladies on the terrace showered nose-gays, worn hitherto in their bosoms, among the serenaders, and the young nobles around them, which they eagerly caught or raised and set in their breasts; all save the Knight of St. John, who made no effort to secure any.

When the laughing scramble was over, the serenaders crowded up the terrace; and, as if starting from a dream, Lucrezia arose.

"How is this? I have not thrown my nosegay!" she said, hurriedly. "And ye are all matched by the chances of the sweet flowers. But the Knight of St. John has picked up none, and so it seems that fate would have us walk to our collation in the grotto together. Therefore, dearest ladies, and my lords, link hands as your flowery lucks direct; and we, as considering his renown we well may without scandal, will follow last with this faithful Knight of the Cross."

The youthful ladies immediately obeyed their mistress, by taking the arms of the cavaliers who had chanced upon their nosegays—an artifice which chained the discontented Orsino and Le Beaufort remote from their cynosure, but rendered it impossible for them without extreme courtesy to avoid. A number of pages, beautiful as Cupids, lighted the way with torches which burned with a perfumed lustre, and the procession was set in motion towards the grotto. But the last couple had preceded for some instants ere Lucrezia, without raising her eyes, took the arm of the motionless but reverential knight.

They advanced for some steps in silence, and if Alfonso had previously doubted it, the musical motion of her form might have convinced him of her identity with the ballerina : the recollection of all that had passed between them—his bitter invectives against her—of the light in which he had represented himself—a feeling of tenderness and compassion which he could not vanquish, prolonged the silence. Lucrezia doubtless fathomed the thoughts which possessed him in part, for she bit her proud lip which curled with beauty and haughtiness, and yet smiled with a degree of timidity and wavering doubt as she broke it.

“We are alone, signor,” she said, “which I have purposely contrived—but start not! Whatever you may have heard of Lucrezia Borgia, you, at least, are in no danger from her cruelty—who saved her life at the hazard of your own! Fain would I, by any means, in some part requite the obligation; and chance has perchance offered me no ill one. Your friend, Messer Benbo, assures that you are of noble birth, and of no mean fortunes! The damsel who lured you hither is the heiress of great wealth, the only daughter of a most noble house. She has confessed to me—nay, your divulgement more than confesses it, that she dislikes you not! Signor, deem you—is it impossible that you should love?—For, procuring a dispensation from your vows from our holy father, what remains but that I make two happy, who am said to have made many miserable?”

Alfonso paused for a moment in utter astonishment, mingled, scarcely to his own consciousness, with chagrin; for he discerned in it an anxious attempt to destroy all suspicion in his mind of her identity with the ballerina, and so to conclude the adventure.

“Lady,” he replied, turning suddenly and almost starting at the deep earnestness with which Lucrezia was gazing in expectation of his reply. “Lady, I am deeply bound to you and to the fair dame who honours me so far; but my vow is of that power and efficacy which even the holy father of Christendom cannot absolve—being the determination of my own heart and will.”

“It must be,” replied Lucrezia, with a playful and yet melancholy smile—“It must be, signor, that your heart is already pledged, and the memory of some one very beauteous makes all our Roman charms poor in your sight.”

“It is not so, illustrious lady,” replied Alfonso, with involuntary fervour. “For until I came to Rome, I never gazed on beauty that won from me more than the eye-homage which as fair a painting might have claimed.”

“Why, then,—since you have never seen the lady’s face, you say,—said you not so? with whose hand I would enrich you, knight, will you not at least delay your stay until you have?” said Lucrezia. “For love comes more stealthily than light, of which even the dark cypresses are enamoured in our Italian noondays—and how know you but that your hour may strike at last?”

“Bright lady, it is known that you are love’s oracle!—and yet still let me deem my heart in little danger from any of your fairest satellites,” replied Alfonso, with a strange mixture of asperity and warmth.

“Love’s oracle!—then indeed am I inspired by an unknown god!” replied Lucrezia, colouring more beautifully than ever in the earnest look which Alfonso cast upon her, as she uttered the words so contradictory to her reported character. “But mistake me not, sir Hospitaller! I

deny not the meaning of your glance, for I have sought love in all things, and under all forms!—And if I have found it not, even when most inspiring it—if I have listened to its richest eloquence as to some foreign language which my heart understood not—it is not that I have lacked the soul for love! Love I found not—but I deny not the accusation of your glance—its phantoms I have eagerly chased; and since happiness cannot be mine, wherefore should I hesitate at least to quaff at the purple fountains of pleasure, and feast out the else unmeaning or troubled dream of life?"

"You need no other defence, lady, than that which was used of old—to display your beauty to your judges," replied Alfonso, coldly.

"As Phryne, the Athenian courtesan! You example me nobly, signor,—but I blame you not," she replied, with exceeding sadness and gentleness. "What avails contending with destiny?—And this is mine."

"If Lucrezia Borgia complains of fortune, who then has cause to praise her!" he said, secretly touched with the plaintive submission of the reply.

"A vintage feast overshadowed by a thunderstorm, who enjoys?" returned Lucrezia with vivacity, but pausing suddenly.

"I fear, lady, you have too severe a confessor, since futurity appears to you under so dark a simile," said the knight, with an innuendo which he thought would not escape Lucrezia's notice.

"Futurity!—how can my confessor threaten me with that, when I obey all his injunctions to the letter—when—but no, I have indeed done wrong," said Lucrezia, turning pale, and instantly adding, with a liveliness which, from the contrast, seemed forced,—"But we are fallen in a mōle's pace; and despite your sanctity, my Lord Orsino looks often back?—Signor, I will not take your denial until you have seen all my fair court unveiled, (among whom will be the nymph of the Egerian fount,) and if your cold eye selects none, your silence shall be a sufficient answer."

She quickened her step as she spoke the word, and they soon approached the grotto which was in complete darkness. Perhaps this was purposely ordained, for when they reached the entrance Lucrezia hastened some steps before the Hospitaller, made a signal to one of the attendants, and with a general start the company found themselves standing in a blaze of light from innumerable lamps, which seemed to kindle of their own accord. The sumptuous dresses of the dames and cavaliers blazed into view; the fountain leaped up to a great height and descended in showers of liquid jewels of lovely hues; and a collation of exquisite viands, fruit, sweetmeats, and wines, served in richly wrought plate, wooed the appetite on every hand. Sweet harmonies were audible in the neighbouring groves, and amidst a fanfare of trumpets, and a general buzz of delight and admiration, Lucrezia took her seat with Cæsar at the banquet.

The Orsino glared gloomily at Alfonso as he entered, and Le Beaufort, who better knew what was to be feared in that quarter, grew pale; and the smiles which Lucrezia profusely bestowed on the latter, and the silence and reserve of the Hospitaller, as he took his place as far as possible from the queen of the feast, but little lightened Paolo's uneasiness.

The flower of the beauty, wit, and magnificence of the pontifical court seemed culled to grace this festival, for none was present who was not remarkable for one of the attributes, and sometimes for a union of all. The most beautiful women in Italy, whom the jubilee had assembled in

Rome, and her own noble and lovely retinue, surrounded Lucrezia; and yet envy itself could not deny that she surpassed them all. Nevertheless, and perhaps for the first time, she misdoubted the supremacy of her own beauty; and while affecting to have her attention absorbed in other objects, her eye watched with devouring anxiety every glance of the Hospitaller's.

Alfonso, on his part, desirous to strengthen himself in his resolutions, by removing temptations from his path which he felt every instant growing more irresistible, and to misguide the hatred of the Duke of Romagna, affected to be instantly struck with the appearance of one of Lucrezia's ladies, who in stature and the colour of the hair somewhat resembled her. It seemed that he mistook her for the damsel of the grotto, laughingly challenging her acquaintance, which she as merrily denied, declaring herself to be the wife of one of the noblemen present; but Alfonso would not be convinced, and attached himself to her with a zeal which brought on both a continual play of raillery.

Lucrezia immediately observed this artifice, which she did not suspect to be one; but her terror of the Duke suggested a somewhat similar procedure: she affected to join her guests in their merriment, and, supported at once by pride, rivalry, and the unbounded admiration of her courtiers, which seemed to restore her confidence in her beauty, her gaiety dazzled even in that universal blaze. Among the banqueters were some of the most brightly imaginative, or profoundly politic of the great geniuses who made the age illustrious; and yet the brilliant play and coruscations of Lucrezia's wit, and the depth of some of those glittering remarks which fell from her lips, were not surpassed by any. There was, indeed, something of recklessness in the general effect—a tone of defiance and mockery,—the lightning's power to scorch as well as shine; but when relapsing into what appeared to be its more natural moods it was scarcely possible to resist the seductions of her eloquence. Even the doctrines which, half in gaiety, and half in haughty acceptance of the character assigned to her, she promulgated, full of poetical epicureanism, came with so sweet an harmony from her lips that saints could not have wished them intended.

Alfonso continued to play his own part, but he lost not a single word nor gesture of the lady; and his regrets increased every moment with his admiration. He observed too,—and without the pleasure which men should take in a friend's happiness, that her choicest smiles were showered upon the young English noble, who, although he had usually a good deal of attention to spare from the fair sex to his own very handsome person, seemed to have neither eyes, nor ears, nor understanding, for any form, sound, or utterance but Lucrezia's. Scarcely past the childhood of love, he was already in its dotage: his soul drank in the beams of her loveliness as a palm-tree absorbs the fervid light of Africa—inmoveable with passionate enjoyment! The Hospitaller's dissatisfaction was still more intense when he remembered that Le Beaufort was still deceived with regard to the real personage of the fairy who had treated him with such freedom in the carnival.

Gaiety and convivial enjoyment seemed the only feelings in Cæsar's breast, although his demeanour to Lucrezia was not calculated to dispel the ideas which were known to possess some of the guests. Even the saturnine wit of Machiavelli took lively colours in reflecting back that of Lucrezia; but the epicurean Bembo was in a paradise of delight, and de-

fended himself but faintly against an accusation which Machiavelli urged on him, that he had avowed a determination to make Donna Lucrezia as immortal as Petrarcha's Laura, in his verses.

"Inasmuch as hopelessness was Petrarcha's muse, certes I may boast the same," said Bembo, warmly. "But would to Heaven that my verse could sufficiently please your grace to obtain me even a glory so mournful."

"Nay, Messer canon, methinks this life is long enough to be unhappy in," replied Lucrezia, with a playful sarcasm, in which there mingled the sigh of a deeper feeling.

"Madama, it is impossible to escape your immortality," said Duke Guidobaldo. "Even now, Messer Pietro has in his doublet, fairly penned on a perfumed and flowered parchment, a matchless canzonet in your praise."

"Let us hear it, Messer Pietro—since among you it is determined I must appear at the bar of posterity," said Lucrezia, and after the usual modest denials and defences, the fascinated canon produced a canzone, which we may quote as a specimen of the artificial court style in which Messer Bembo prided himself in excelling.

CANZONE.

Immortals! when of old
Pandora with all gifts ye did endow,—
Thy rainbow brow,
And eyes in which *light lies*, Love's mother, thou;
Cupid, thy bow to form the rosy part
Whence arrowy smiles might dart;
Pallas, thy wit; Diana, thy chaste bliss
So perfect that it knows not that it is!
Who thought the gods, like sculptors skilled,
Could in a second mould improve the first,
Making a lovelier in Lucrezia now?
The ancient fable more than truth?
Perfection perfected?—completion filled?
Hebe give fresher than her freshest youth?
But with this bettered best we have a worsened worst!
For all the ills Pandora's box
Could yield—the thousand natural shocks—
More anguish work her subtle charms,
More infinite griefs and harms,
For, oh, antique Lucretia! in thine
Lingered the comforter divine,
While our Pandora still to all denies
Hope!—without which love cannot cease—yet dies!

During the recitation of this elaborate inspiration Lucrezia listened with a kind of absent smile; and when it was concluded, and the poet expected his meed of thanks, she began to utter them—but suddenly her voice faltered, and tears rushed in a sparkling shower to her eyes.

"Sannazzaro writes not thus of me!—and the syrens of his native Parthenope have taught him so sweet a warble to his verse, that posterity will listen with a pleased ear," she said, laughing with disdain at her own weakness, and yet with tears, so that her cheeks resembled carnations in the sun after a shower. "And yet this is of a fair sound, too!—we would fain have with us some of the masters of the future thoughts of men.—Messer Niccolò, what deem you of your schoolfellow's verse?"

"As of my schoolfellow's, lady," replied Machiavelli, smiling.

"It is too Lombard for Messer Niccolò's taste. He permits no phrase that cannot be found in bright Boccaccio," said the young cardinal of Medici.

"These trifles lose their appreciation in ears that have been long out of

Florence, and grown familiar in their wanderings with all the other dialects of Italy, Eminence," replied Niccolò, with a smile of peculiar meaning to the brother of the exiled Pier. "But I marvel to hear your most reverend lordship recommend Boccaccio so warmly, as an it were of as profitable perusal as some holy breviary."

"Men look not in breviaries for good language, sir secretary, but good divinity—though I have not heard you look in them for aught," replied the young cardinal.

"What occasion, my lord, when we see how zealously the ministers of religion preach it by example?" said Machiavelli.

Cæsar interrupted this sharp interchange by proposing a ballet, to which Lucrezia languidly assented, and the brilliant company trooped out into the meadow before the grotto. The religious knight, who was also in heavy garniture, of course declined any share in the revelry; but Paolo Orsino eagerly offered himself as Lucrezia's partner. To his surprise and evident chagrin she replied, in an absent manner, by declaring that she had already danced so much that day as to be too weary; and then observing a sudden glance which Alfonso cast at her, full of some strange intelligence, Paolo retired in silent wrath.

Cæsar's vigilant eye probably noted the whole scene, and perceiving that the Orsino strolled discontentedly away from the revellers, he took an opportunity, and quietly glided after him, into a singular winding maze of myrtles.

Hearing steps the moody lover turned, and recognizing Cæsar awaited his approach, perhaps more in suspicion than in respect.

"Chance is my friend, Lord Paolo; I knew not by what means, unobservedly, to win your private ear," said the duke, very graciously, and even affectionately. "Our Lady be thanked!—I have now an occasion for which I have long prayed, to convince your noble house of the sincerity of my goodwill to it, and desire to conclude its projected alliance with ours."

"Signor, it needs no assurances.—The sudden coldness of his holiness to ourselves—his open scorns on our allies—the Lady Lucrezia's contempt—are matters that speak for themselves!" replied Paolo, with infinite bitterness.

"I do mistrust that it is yonder buckram from Ferrara that makes our sire so stiff!" returned Cæsar, and Paolo's start confessed how suddenly the insinuation found entry into his mind. "Nay, I have more than suspicion in warranty for believing that the Hospitaller's uncourtly refusals are but to blind suspicion—that under veil of the foolish farce, at which we all clapped hands to-night, Lucrezia gave this man an audience, to listen to renewed proposals from Ferrara."

"Signor, if you deem so, and are sincere in your promises to us, you will on the moment drive him back to his insolent master!" exclaimed the Orsino, instantly and vehemently excited.

"I am not the master in Rome; moreover, this is a mission with whose secret import only the pontiff and Lucrezia are acquainted, but we all behold the effects," replied Cæsar. "Yet for the sincerity of my intents, this confidence may vouch; and, moreover, I frankly avow that if I saw not my own interests in yours you should have sought it in some other quarter. To be briefly tedious—I have conceived a great project, to which the alliance with Ferrara would be fatal, and to succeed in which I cannot hope without yours."

"I would refuse few matters short of my honour or life to have this demonstrated, signor!" said Paolo, eagerly.

"To begin then where—'tis strange—yet few men do—even at the beginning," said Cæsar; "I have discovered (it was at Braeciano) that it is in vain to hope to found a dominion among these hills of Romulus;—frankly, your tusks defend your pork so well, that 'tis out of hope—though that be infinite—to make a roast of ye! Patience!—I shall come to a point anon! Of late, his hot holiness being angry with Ferrara, we were wont to discourse together how that, albeit usurped from the church, the lands on the Po are as much to be found in the bequest of the Countess Matilda (Heaven keep her silly ghost!) as any of those on Tiber, which ye grasp so tightly! Moreover, they lie as it were in one hug with my possessions in Romagna, and with Bologna—but I speak not of the sausage-makers now—they are your friends;—and thereupon flattering me with fine toys of winning the ducal crown of Ferrara, to set upon these brows of mine, by aid of your potent alliance,—his paternity wiled me of my consent into his project of marrying his daughter into your house—which, I will confess, I had till then opposed as the ruin of all my hopes."

"My lord, if I have thought so, you will pardon the jealousies of one who hath so priceless a good in chase, that he fears a rival even in the stirring of the wind!" replied the Orsino, struck with the candour of the avowal.

"But all is changed since these accursed Ferrarese set foot in Rome!" exclaimed Cæsar. "The pontiff discourses strangely with me.—And wherefore delays he this marriage, to effect which doubtless he invited you to Rome?"

"His holiness bids me win his heavenly daughter's consent, and I have his own," returned the startled Orsino.

"Once he was not wont to ask her pleasure, but bade her do his—a true Spanish father!" said Cæsar. "But how progress you with the lady?—By all mankind's! I think she gives your love but such frosty sunshine as rather blasts than feeds the vine."

Paolo's dismal aspect acknowledged the truth of the observation.

"Ha, and it cannot be mere maiden modesty," continued Cæsar, laughing again. "So haughty-fair a dame, in whose veins flows the aspiring Borgian blood, were like enough to prefer the sovereignty of Ferrara even to your as potent vassalage.—Have we not all remarked how, despite his feigned slights, she still pours the full sunshine of her kindness on this emissary?"

"He did her some service—more indeed by chance than will;—your grace remembers our accursed chase of the 'buffalo?'" said Paolo, hurriedly. "But if I thought—if I had proof of this treachery!" he continued fiercely, and clutching the hilt of his dagger; when Cæsar interrupted by gently grasping his arm, and whispering in a mild and reproaching tone, "Signor—he saved your life!"

"'Tis true!—'tis very true!" returned the Orsino, somewhat ashamedly, and relinquishing his hold. "But if he would take it again—if he would deprive me of the only hope which renders life pleasant to me—life sufferable!—hath he not cancelled the obligation?"

"But not on suspicions—when certainties themselves would scarcely excuse—should men rush to extremities of such import!" said Cæsar. "Yet I own it were bitter to you if the envoy should succeed, (and 'tis like enough, seeing how offended his holiness is with the insolence of

your allies—Vitellozzo, in especial), why then, I say, it were no pleasing office for you, as the greatest of the Roman barons, to hold the haughty bridegroom's stirrup as he mounts to go to church."

"When that hour comes—but your grace is pleased to make me your fool and mock!" exclaimed the Orsino, with flashing eyes.

"My good angel grant, if I have one, that I am not myself made Fortune's idiot in this matter!" said Cæsar, speaking thickly, as if half choked with indignation.

"Your highness is known to be a poet, and these fears may be but visions of your fertile imagination," replied Paolo.

"As I have told you, I but doubtfully affirm this man's purposes—for I repeat, my Paolo, I am not admitted into the core of their mysteries.—It is in vain to deny what all the world hath long whispered, that his holiness's heart is not so entire with me as it was once;—the old man dreams only of the aggrandizement of his dotage, his superb melon-flower, as he calls her,—his daughter!" said Cæsar, with unaffected bitterness. "But will it not seem strange if, after granting the envoy this interview to-night, alone, in these gardens,—to-morrow she exhibits a sudden change to coldness and distance with him?—Ask me not whence I derive my thought—but use your own eyes."

"Alone!—in these gardens!" muttered the Orsino.

"The power is in your hands to confirm or remove our fears!" said Cæsar, tranquilly remarking the effect of his insinuations. "Use it;—for opportunity, as Niccolò will tell you, but that you love him not, hath only a lock of hair in front whereby to be seized. Demand the immediate fulfilment of the promised nuptials, backed by the overawing of all your mighty confederacy. Let the pontiff know that you have the power and dare to use it—in a short time it will melt away in your hands!"

The Orsino looked at Cæsar, almost staggered into some belief in his sincerity, above all cajoled by the allurement held out of the immediate gratification of the fierce passion which raged in his rich Roman blood—for though we speak of love these epithets only can be applied to the maddening desire which Lucrezia's supreme beauty kindled.

Still he replied with hesitation—"Signor, you speak of dethroning one of the most powerful and ancient of the princes of Italy, as an it were but stretching out your hand to pluck a ripe fig!—And one in close alliance with the victorious King of France!"

"And therefore the more mine enemy!—unless I buy a return of the favour I have forfeited by promoting the alliance with Ferrara, which Louis hath always so earnestly sought, with intent to secure to such faithful friends all that should be mine—which his holiness will joyfully heap on his daughter's husband!" returned Cæsar, passionately. "But the republic of Florence is equally protected by France; and yet the friends of Pier de' Medici do not despair to see the golden balls glistening once more over the portals of the Signory!"

"But the friends of Messer Niccolò of Florence are not likely to aid in any such enterprize!" said Paolo, once more very dubiously.

"I desire only that men should believe in my actions—for words are air, and impossibilities are as easily shaped in them as aught feasible," replied the subtle Borgia. "Let us keep from these revelers, Paolo;—the very leaves must not hear me now, lest they whisper it again. If thou wilt apply the test we have devised,—if we find the reality of our suspicions,—if thou wilt enter into this compact with me, that Ferrara shall

be mine,—as preliminaries and hostages of faith I consent that we will unitedly restore the Medici in Florence, and compel the pontiff to ratify the marriage between yourself and Lucrezia—if it be true that so wise a politician sets store on such a trifle as a woman, more or less.”

“ These are still but words, my lord, in which you have well said that impossibilities are possible,” replied the Orsino.

“ But I will give you things.—I was about to say—what was it?—I am overwhelmed by a sea of thoughts;—nay, not overwhelmed, but much betossed,” said Cæsar, musingly. “ To the matter!—thou knowest how valuable the city of Arezzo is to the Florentines; what a thorn it was in their sides until they subdued it,—being so equally near to themselves and their enemies the Vitelli, at Castello?”

“ I have not forgotten mine own name, signor, nor these matters,” returned the Orsino, coldly.

“ But thou knowest not that when I was warring in Tuscany, came to me secretly two of its chief citizens, with offer to raise the city against the Florentines, if I would sanction the enterprize?” said Cæsar. “ Your friends were then not mine, and I refused; but with all my friendship with Niccolò I betrayed not those worthy gentlemen, who still go about in Arezzo with their heads on their shoulders.”

“ Something—tis true—I have heard of this,” said the Orsino, now much shaken.

“ A word of mine could re-stir this action—a warning that the republic has information of their treason ripens it at once—if Vitellozzo would promise aid from Castello,” continued the Borgia. “ That word shall be uttered as soon as I am convinced of the reality of my fears. A successful revolt would rally all the partisans of the Medici,—the French will be soon too busy in Naples to obstruct us,—and together we will invade Tuscany,—restore Pier,—and thus mightily strengthened, think you the pontiff would dare to refuse his daughter to your victorious arms?”

Artfully dovetailed as this project seemed to be, still if he had not been blinded with passion the sagacious Orsino would probably have discerned many flaws or unstable junctions in it. As it was, he endeavoured to adjourn any positive resolution by reverting to his doubts of the pretended mission from Ferrara—the basis on which the whole structure stood; but Cæsar, craftily adapting himself to this mood, urged that he should make the assay which he had proposed, and rouse all the confederacy to an united and peremptory demand for the fulfilment of the understood compact in the alliance between their leader and the lady of the Borgias. Unable of course even to conjecture the extraordinary discoveries which Cæsar imagined he had made, and which secretly actuated him, Paolo could divine no reason to suspect his sincerity in thus accelerating the measures once so unpalatable to him, and for the dangerous confidence reposed in his enemies. Finally, he consented at least to propose the matter to the barons, so far as related to the expediency of demanding an immediate conclusion of the marriage: the rest being withheld until the result was ascertained on which it depended.

In the midst of the discussion on this latter point, which passed chiefly in whispers, the distant music of the revelry, which had hitherto never ceased, suddenly came to a pause which attracted Cæsar’s attention.

“ Surely Lucrezia has taken the pet at our long absence, and broken up the festival!” he exclaimed. “ Let us hasten to learn; and meanwhile, in token of our new brotherhood, let us embrace, Paolo—and separate.

Is it possible!—do you wear steel beneath satin?" he continued, releasing Paolo from a fraternal pressure.

"And take antidotes before all my meals—and sleep in chambers so barred and guarded that even the invisible slayers of young Salerno can hardly come at my throat!" replied the Orsino, with a gloomy glance at the unruffled visage of Cæsar.

"And you do well—for in truth the Romans have not misnamed my sister—the Fatal Bride!" returned he gaily. "But she is an apple to be gathered on a holiday, even at the risk of clasping the devil's burning hand out of the leaves instead!"

The Orsino smiled with an effort, and the new allies, wending their way out of the maze, separated as they approached the light of the revelry.

"And now," mused Cæsar, with a long, scornful gaze after his late companion; "and now—will he take our damsel in the raw of her late strange discomfiture, and she will turn as restive as an unmanaged barb. —And his holiness is not yet so subdued to the quality of milk that he may not be stirred to anger by the first rude shock of the power he would confirm to his rebels. The Vitelli busied at Arezzo—the Orsini irritating the French in attempting to reseat their cousin—the war of Naples imminent—the cards are once more in my hands!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"I have thought
Too long and darkly, till my brain became,
In its own eddy boiling and o'erwrought,
A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame."—BYRON.

Mingling with the first group of revellers whom he encountered, Paolo learned that Cæsar's conjecture was well founded, so far as related to Lucrezia, who had suddenly retired with a few persons of her suite, but commanding that the festival should continue as long as it pleased those who shared it. He looked around instantly for the Hospitaller, and perceived him standing almost in the precise attitude and place where he had left him; but Sir Reginald had been chosen by the lady to escort her to her litter.

All interest in the scene instantly vanished from Paolo's breast, and he gave immediate orders for his retinue to assemble and depart, impatiently waiting for the duke's reappearance to take his farewell. The bustle seemed to startle the Hospitaller from a waking dream, and he also hastened to quit the valley.

He had not gone far when he met Le Beaufort, returning from his honourable service—and, contrary to all custom, so lost in thought that when Alfonso suddenly paused in his way he started back as if he had not in the least observed his approach.

"Soh!—her favour extended not so far—as yet—as to invite you to accompany her to Rome?" said Alfonso, with a deep pang as he observed Le Beaufort's somewhat guilty blush. "And yet your close conference this hour might have settled a weightier matter."

"I pray you jest not thus with me, my lord, and brother-in-arms!" replied Sir Reginald, testily.

“ What, brother Reginald! that hadst ever a hawk’s eye for the meanest game, dost pretend thou wouldest have denied this peerless dame so small a request? ” said Alfonso, with an ironical laugh.

“ No, nor my heart’s blood, if she demanded it! ” said Le Beaufort, enthusiastically. “ But you speak, my lord, of the betrothed of my friend; —yet, in good faith, she might have honoured me to be her escort, but that it pleases her, late as the hour is, to visit her confessor in his hermitage on some hill they call Aventine,—and takes with her as few attendants as possible.”

“ Indeed, indeed! —why, yes, ‘tis late! ” said Alfonso, somewhat wildly. “ Midnight, I think; —what wouldest thou give, brother, to be this lady’s confessor? ”

“ Nay, that office were more to your taste, being a Knight of St. John, ” replied Le Beaufort, quite unconscious of the Hospitaller’s insinuation. “ But yet, by’r Lady! were it not for Paolo, I would give the whole world to be anything that never left her! —To be a flower in her bosom, though I sicklied and died there! —a bird to sing in a cage when she was at ‘broidery! —a hound to lie at her feet, and be patted by her eider-down hand! —a pillow on which to rest her warm cheek! —And, oh, how lovingly I would press around the dint of its gracious rest! ”

“ Let Paolo look to it; —for thou wilt smother his betrothed, if sorcery be not incapable of the transformation! ” said Alfonso, stung at heart, and determined if possible to take away what he more than concluded to be a groundwork for these rapturous fancies. “ And tell me truly, brother, did not the Fairy Morgana offer thee some such assistance? ”

Le Beaufort’s ingenuous countenance coloured again, as he replied with hesitation, “ She promised—success in all things, and to all men, that they dared undertake—and invited me like the rest to visit her in her Palace of Fallaeys. ”

“ Shame on thee, then, that had not the courage to remind her of her promise—as perchance she meant when she made you her escort to-night! ” returned Alfonso, with singular vehemence.

“ Shame on thee to speak thus of so honourable a lady—but that ‘tis in jest, ” said Le Beaufort, also warmly. “ Such fair sayings are but meant as the pace-eggs which we colour beautifully in my land, to crush at Easter in mock tilts.—Things not to be remembered.—And yet it was strange how anxiously she inquired how men liked her pageant and her sayings—would have me describe her look, her gestures, her very words—though in faith and troth it made me redden like a winter-berry to repeat some! ”

“ Nay, then, thou wert not so mere a beginner as to deny her the opening which her promise gave to offer—fulfilment? ” replied the irritated knight.

“ Not purposely—it stumbled forth, I know not how, ” said Sir Reginald, with perfect integrity of look. “ And we both but laughed at the quaint fancy of it—and it was then that you saw her whisper to me, for I noted your eye upon us—and she bade me tell you the story, with a mock that she desired to know what the fairy had promised to you, as she meant to keep all the promises of Morgana herself. ”

Alfonso looked incredulously at Sir Reginald for an instant, and then with a heart which beat in thick throbs, he exclaimed almost with contempt, “ Boy! and didst thou miss the meaning of that! —Go to, go to; thou wilt not understand her when—but it matters not; the Orsino is fortunate in such a rival. ”

"By the bonny broom, though—if one had kissed me as thou reportedst the girl of these grottoes—nymphs is it ye call them?—kissed thee—in faith, I had had more to boast of, or I had not boasted so much," exclaimed the young knight, vehemently. "Oh, fie, fie!—in England, kiss and tell goes to a warning rhyme."

"Do thou be secret then of thy farther fortunes; she is no icicle thou hast to deal with!" said Alfonso, shuddering with suppressed fury. "Go now to thy friend, as I will to mine inn, which I use for my covering and convenience."

With this covert gibe the ancient brothers-in-arms separated with much less than their usual cordiality—Le Beaufort the more indignant perhaps at the suspicions insinuated, because his throbbing pulses half confessed that they were not unfounded. Alfonso meanwhile hurried on, forming a new project which his recent success in a similar one suggested, for he was now animated by a frenzy which no consideration of danger or difficulty, or even right or decency, could resist. One of his most terrible suspicions had been overthrown, but with such confirmation of a worse—the worst!—as Cæsar's black jealousy bestowed; yet still Alfonso felt an imperative necessity to obtain positive proof to give his soul the least hope of calm. Lucrezia had gone to her confessor, and remembering the circumstances of the locality, Alfonso followed.

He made such good speed that when he came within sight of the gigantic ruins of Caracalla's Baths, he perceived by the advancing torches which the horsemen of her guard carried that Lucrezia's retinue had not reached them. Approaching nearer he observed them halt near the ruins, and in a few moments the lady, muffled in a dark Spanish mantilla, descended from the litter, received by a bobbing, quivering monk, in whom Alfonso easily recognised Fra Biccocco. Escorted by him she walked hastily into the ruins, disappearing soon in their intricacies; and recalling all the observations he had made on his former visit, Alfonso wound his way from the rear to the same point, so that none of the retinue, who were laughing and criticising the festival among themselves, discerned him. Thence he rapidly threaded his way to the chamber in which he had shared Fra Biccocco's hospitality, through which the lady and her guide had just passed; boldly followed into the opening from which Bruno's cell was reached, and laid down among the long grass, befriended by the darkness, until Biccocco descended from his accomplished task, returning into his abode proper. Alfonso then sprang up, and in a few instants was at his former post of observation, looking into Fra Bruno's hermitage or laboratory, whichever it was.

The confessor himself had been as far from anticipating one arrival as the other, which those who had seen him some time before it happened would have acknowledged. For hours he had been seated at his large stone table, which was covered with open volumes of ponderous manuscript, nearly all in the learned or in eastern languages, perusing what seemed likely to prove an addition to their number—a huge sheet of parchment, headed in large characters, which Biccocco in his devote admiration had carefully illuminated,

"*De Praedestinatione.*"

For some minutes the theologian had leaned himself exhaustedly back in his chair, but still holding his pen in hand, as if meditating farther exploits.

"This then, was the thesis," he mused half aloud, after the manner of solitary thinkers, as if essaying the effect on themselves of their own arguments. "'*PREDESTINATIO NECESSITAT*'—and yet—'*INJUSTUS NON EST DEUS*.' Fate is inevitable, but God is just; these are the terms. *Sanctus Augustinus, ad Sextum, dixit*—" and then he paused in too rapid a series of thought for words. "Yes, *Saint Augustin* said it;—and is it a demon or an angel in thy soul, *Bruno*, which would have thee believe it? *Vanitas vanitatum!*—vainest of all sciences—science of words—theology! And do they hang on my lips for the echo of heavenly oracles—echoes only of the dreams of men—when in every human heart—no, no, let us not look in the heart for the will of God! It is not there—it is—where? In these musty parchments, or in yonder sweet air, which woos me forth to rejoice in the beauty of the night? Get thee behid me, *Satan*!—what have I to do with beauty in any form?—*Satan*, I spit at thee.

"*Meritum hominis nullum est*;—why then,—yes, it were just if man's offences were also nothing—not to be imputed to him—more than his deservings! And if it was eternally thus—eternally damned or eternally saved—follows it not—wherefore make this short pause of existence a part of the futurity of hell, if it must be—that night be at least a short glimpse of Heaven? Wherefore, *Bruno*—O wretch, O monster! what devil is whispering thee! Yet let us not be afraid of reason—or, fiend, dost thou take its form? Let us reason. Is love in itself a crime? *Deus amor est*?—no. What, then, is criminal in love?—Priest, answer. But wert thou not first a man? And what is a man, mere man? A beast! from which degradation thou hast recused thyself—to sit on a frozen eminence, and see mankind rejoice in the warm valleys beneath. Yet to be *in wisdom as a god*—this is something! Yea, this is something!"

He paused, and the perfect stillness of the desert Aventine permitted some breathings of the remote music of the revelry in the valley of Egeria to come to his hearing; and after listening for a moment, he arose and traversed his cell with a rapid step.

"They are around her now in revelry—they gaze upon her with their gloating eyes—perchance her warm blood kindles too in the contagion!—but no, no, when that befalls!—What is it to thee, *Fra Bruno*? Not only tyranny took—O, slave, thou didst abdicate all right! Measureless sacrifice!—and yet again abandonedest the task for which it was decreed! What task?—When Heaven itself takes his part!—When thou darest not proclaim its behests, and he holds up his hands to stay the thunder, and it pauses!—Let us to our words again; let us not think. Yet at the worst, torture immortal were not too great a penalty to pay if—old man!—emaciated friar!—what is this thou ravest? Even the conclusion of the thesis: *Non perseverantes usque in finem non sunt prædestinati!*—that is all."

At this point, when the theologian was about to continue his disquisition, having resumed his pen and place, voices were audible, and Biccocco entered, having scarcely time to announce *Donna Lucrezia* ere she followed.

"A fair even, father,—be not startled;—I was returning from my gardens of Egeria, and I have brought your altar some of its choicest flowers," she said, in a reverential and timid voice, producing at the same time a superb nosegay. "Moreover, I would speak a few words alone with you—Father Biccocco, with your good allowance."

The worthy friar, looking at her as she threw back her mantle on her shoulders with a goggle of intense admiration, and almost wonder

that there could be anything so beautiful, respectfully prepared to obey.

"Biccocco!—I command thee, stay!" exclaimed Fra Bruno, starting up. "I would say—nay, daughter, is it thou?—I knew not at first—Biccocco, I bade thee let none trouble me—but, tears?—What ails our gentle penitent? Hath she forgotten a whole string of ayes? Or what heavier offence? It was but yesterday I counselled with thee. But a few hours is much to a woman;—wherefore glow thy checks thus with this fire of shame?—Biccocco, leave us."

"Father, I have sinned—yes, in these few hours have grievously sinned," said the bright penitent, melting into a passion of tears as soon as the restraint of Biccocco's presence was removed, and little aware of the listener who succeeded. "I have sinned—but I repent, and even in mine offence have found its chastisement."

"Art thou then well assured that it is repentance—not regret?" replied the monk. "Thy sex doth oft mistake one for the other. But what is the matter—surely it might not hinder thee of thy needful rest—might bide the light, to listen to—for, indeed, thou art now strangely pale!"

"I have been mad, my father!—I know not what I have done!—I dare not look at you and tell you; let me arrange my flowers in your chalices while I speak," replied Lucrezia, hiding her face in the fragrant bundle.

"Not so—the eye and look oft confesses more than the apologising lip," returned the confessor, now evidently startled. "Kneel in thy wonted place; no other attitude becomes thy dignity or mine; for either thou kneelest to the servant of God, or debasest thyself before the brother of man."

Lucrezia complied instantly, and the Penitentiary throwing himself back in his chair, fixed his eyes on the crucifix before him, without even glancing at his penitent.

"Father, you—you warned me—would I had taken heed!" she began, still weepingly. "I had not suffered this shame—but my vanity!—it was but my vanity. You warned me of all the ills that would happen—by all that have happened—never even to look at him again.—How wicked it was, I knew, for the Knights of St. John are almost priests!—but it stung my proud soul to the quick to think that he should despise and publicly scorn me!"

"Of whom speak we now? What is all this, daughter?" said Fra Bruno, turning very pale, and glancing with a degree of fierceness mingled with astonishment at the penitent.

"The Hospitaller who saved my life.—Ah, father, you know not what women feel when—the cold Knight of St John, my father!"

"Well, what of him?—thou hast not had him harmed for his faithfulness to his vows?" returned the Dominican, hurriedly.

"Harmed! I would rather myself perish in some very cruel way than any ill should befall him," exclaimed the penitent.

"Then, indeed, thou hast committed a deadly crime!—A darker adultery of the soul!" said Fra Bruno, wildly. "Nay, my child, I speak too harshly now. But what hast thou more to say? Time wears, and this soft cheek should be upon the down, or its sweetness will not blow so freshly as some of its rivals at dawn. Thou seest this hermitage from which thou wouldest lure me yields me some recollections to brighten its desolation.—What is it thou wouldest say?"

"How shall I say it—that am ashamed to think it?" said Lucrezia, hesi-

tatingly. “But yes, yes, thou didst behold—thou wilt remember—in the carnival to-day—”

“They said thou wert the actress in sooth of an evil part; and but that thou didst it perchance to flaunt the Orsini, it pained me, indeed, to witness thy folly with the English boy,” said Fra Bruno.

“The fairy deceived you then as well as others.—I know not why, assuming my part, and so completely as to deceive the Orsini themselves,” replied Lucrezia, clasping her soft hands on the bony one with which the friar grasped the arm of his chair. “But be not very angry with me, father!—I played even a worse—oh, far worse!—I feared, alas! that you knew me!—remember you not that wicked, wicked ballerina?”

Fra Bruno was for a moment silent, and then said in a cold undertone, as if endeavouring to recollect, “Methinks I saw some such vessel of infamy—some such unhappy lostness—lasciviously disporting to win the gaze of a ruffianly mob at the Capitol.”

“Nay, now you wrong her—you wrong me, Fra Bruno!—lasciviously, what is that?” exclaimed Lucrezia, with some indignation. “What did I do to merit such a word?”

“Thou!—daughter, thou!—what ails thee?—are we awake?” said Bruno, snatching his hand furiously away.

“Nay, dearest father, nay, but hear me!” continued Lucrezia, in spite of his wrath regaining his hand, and holding it between her own. “I intended but to win him to—to some foolish meeting—wherein I intended to expose him to the just laughter of my court.”

“A wise project;—and whither, pray you, Eve’s true descendant?” said the monk, more mildly.

“In the grotto of Egeria.”

“The grotto of Egeria!—and so he refused thy lures, and thou art vexed to have escaped perdition?” returned the Penitentiary.

“Nay,—for he came.”

“He came!—jest not in such a matter as this!—thou knowest his certain destruction—new horrors—more blood—rave not, my daughter, madness like this—for again the direful gulf will open!—thou knowest I have cause, too, to love—to wish this man well;—at least this one!” said Bruno, somewhat incoherently.

“Tis that emboldens me—and the immediacy of the danger, said Lucrezia. “I must needs avow my whole offence. He came and—”

“Why dost thou pause?—and what? Daughter, what means this silence?” said the friar, now so much agitated, that, but that she was equally so, Lucrezia must have observed it.

“He came—contemned—despised me, mistaking indeed for another—but not the less despising me in both persons,” wept Lucrezia. “And then—oh, my father, I have confessed to thee things—but never aught so strangely mad!—because that I would have him share some offence to justify the clamour I had provided—scarcely I know how to believe it now myself. I did to his—brow—what I now do to your hand!” And she kissed it with profound reverence and many tears.

“Thou!—and yet again, thou!—not yet a proclaimed harlot!—not yet set in the first line of the Book of Shame!—thou, a woman, an all-wooed beauty, a Borgia!” shouted the confessor, convulsively starting at every word of his own climax. “Begone, begone,—tell me no more—madden me not with the rest—the certainty of thy damnation!—Begone!—revel out the dream, and wake in the everlasting flames! Begone!—or some-

thing prompts me that it were even now a holy and an acceptable work to stop thy downward rush—even—even with death!"

"My father! what mean you?—what say you?" exclaimed Lucrezia, colouring fervently. "Oh, indeed, indeed, your suspicion shows me all my ignominy. But, dearest my father!—even then—then—he did but suffer because he wotted not in the darkness mine intent."

"The darkness!"

"Yes—but I know how he despised and hated me for it—when afterwards he made me a jest and scorn to all by relating how it was snatched from him—how he would have repulsed it."

"It is impossible!—it is impossible as to clasp the plague till it is rotten, and share not the contagion!" exclaimed the monk. "Woman, thou mockest me—but, remember, not me alone. His brow? Thou couldst not reach it unless it bent to thee:—darest thou prevaricate with Heaven?"

"Father, I said—said I not his lips?—though indeed his brow would better have contented me—but so it chanced," said Lucrezia, shrinking with a mixture of shame and fear from Fra Bruno's eyes.

"Why then—let us have the rest of the truth, since we improve thus in the re-telling," said the friar, with wonderful bitterness. "Hope not to deceive me!—though thou art of woman's perfect stature, but that he bent to meet thy shamelessness, this might not be."

"Deem you so, father,—is it certain?" said the penitent, with an eagerness so natural and yet so betraying, that though she could not repress it, the manifestation renewed her confusion.

"I am of his stature," exclaimed the Dominican, half rising his tall, attenuated figure—and then sinking back with a low laugh of unutterable self-derision.

"Thou, father!—ay, but for thy clerky bend,—his head is loftier, and set as firmly as that of Mars!" she replied. "But wilt not thou forgive me—wilt not thou at least return with a kiss of pardon this of penitence?"

And once more she raised the friar's hand with touching humility to her lips.

"Of pardon!—no, no, no: go, thou art very vile—what—but just from that unhallowed scene!—Begone, I say!—go to thy sire!—only his supremacy can forgive sins multiplied like thine till the condemning angel closes the record, knowing thou hast incurred the worst! Begone!"

"What ravest thou now? Indeed, but now thou ravest, Friar Bruno! Priest, what meanest thou now?" exclaimed Lucrezia, starting up with sudden indignation. "Thou to whom I have confessed all—thou to taunt me thus! What mean you? Then I will to him myself and warn him of his danger—for during all the meeting the Duke of Romagna was concealed, and watched us from one of the ivy hollows in the cave."

"The Duke of Romagna!" exclaimed the friar, with evident amazement. "Why then—nay, all is well; and yet how came he there?"

"He did believe—or feigned—nay—he believed that I was really the wandering thing I seemed—overheard my messenger—I know not what," said Lucrezia, tremulously. "But 'tis therefore I would have the Hospitaller warned against Cæsar's malice and revenge."

"Cæsar were not like to cherish either if it be true that the knight treated thee with insult and scorn," replied the friar.

"Yea,—but himself betrayed that I—I have told all, father; but me thought the knight would scarcely have revealed—which else Cæsar could

scarcely have suspected—my marvellous madness, when as I said—”

“It needs not—I have heard it,” interrupted the monk hurriedly. “But dost thou truly repent?—does that fair bosom heave now with the freshening winds of penitence, or the ground-swell of a passion which hath exhausted itself even by its own violence?”

“I will undertake what penance pleases you, father; but—I would fain that he were warned of danger,” replied the lady, evasively, but kneeling again with earnest entreaty at the friar’s feet. “I would—if it must be—that he should quit Rome.”

“It is in vain—I have already exhausted persuasion on him—he hath an errand in Rome which he will fulfil at every risk,” replied Fra Bruno, musingly.

“And, father, dost thou also know it?” exclaimed Lucrezia, with a startled expression.

“And who knows—being the marvellous man that he is—but that Heaven intends, by pouring on thee its bitterest vial of love despised, to make thee willingly take to the shelter I have so often pointed out to thee from the storms of the world—which thy fatal beauty—which thy ill renown—which the crimes thou hast caused, and mayest still—the vasty projects to which thou art the stumbling-block—all would urge thee into?” continued the monk, absorbedly. “Know it!—what know you, daughter? Surely thou dost not know his purposes in Rome?”

“Himself has told me—the envoy of Ferrara—to prove against me—to prove me to be—learned father, if there be any word would raise the fiend,—and yet he comes to prove I am the thing!” exclaimed Lucrezia, cowering her face on the monk’s hand.

“Take comfort, daughter; he cannot,” replied the Dominican, bending over her, and speaking in so low a tone that the devouring listener could not distinguish the words.

“But, my father, you forgive me?” said Lucrezia, looking up with a somewhat comforted visage, but suddenly starting as she met the gaze of Fra Bruno. He was silent.

“Speak, you frighten me!—answer me, father!—is it too great an offence—what penance—Blessed Lady!—is he struck with death!—Biccoco!”

“Peace, peace, nothing ails me!—fasting, and too long thought and this anguish!—Salve me, Jesu!—Thy first husband, Lucrezia!—leave me: you poison the very air!—leave me, terrible woman!—Darest thou—with all thy passions still palpitating thus—Oh, Lucrezia!—Light eddies round me!—To stifle me thus—*Domine, an me reliquisti?*—Beautiful fiend! begone.”

“Forgive me, father!—dearest father!—or I shall never sleep again,” said Lucrezia, with a caressing and supplicating gesture, in evident and complete ignorance of the nature of the Dominican’s agitation, and affrighted by the idea that the magnitude of her offence had kindled it.

“Forgive thee!—heavenly Lucrezia! Some sign now! Now let the thunder descend or—” The raving exclamation was cut short by a sound not altogether unresembling that imprecatory: a large block of ruin, dislodged by a sudden and violent movement of the unseen auditor, rolled with a hollow rumble into the vaults below.

The Dominican started up from the benediction which he was bending forward to pronounce—almost dashed Lucrezia away—rushed to his altar—and throwing himself prostrate before the divine symbol which adorned

it, “Blessed be Thy name for ever and for ever!—Gloria Domino! Gloria in Excelsis! Praise ye the Lord!—He saves in the furnace of fire?” he exclaimed in a frantic ecstasy of devotion, and for some minutes was lost in prayer too intense for words.

Lucrezia meanwhile, completely panic-struck and astonished, arose and gazed at the friar in mute dismay; and when at length he raised himself and turned towards her—but that he kept his own eyes steadily fixed on the ground, the womanly unconsciousness of her whole look and attitude might have shown him that the apology he uttered was scarcely necessary—while it utterly clashed with all Alfonso’s dominant ideas.

“Think nought of this—but as of a grief which—thy soul is infinitely precious in my love!—but go now; go, Lucrezia,—I will devise some fitting penance at more leisure,” he said, confusedly.

“But, father—my request?”

“Ay, truly—I will renew my warning.—His safety is dear to me too,” he replied in an altered tone. “But meanwhile, do thou continually cherish these recollections—which methinks may stir a woman and a Borgia to more than repay such wrong,—that as one he hath despised thee, as the other seeks to overwhelm thee with eternal infamy!”

“Yes, yes, and I will hate him—hate him as he hates me,” said Lucrezia, sobbing audibly as she once more shrouded her face in her mantle. “Henceforth I will but think of him to execrate my own folly equally with his merciless arrogance—to despise him as he despises me.”

Smiling with austere melancholy, Fra Bruno raised a lamp to escort the lady out, and Alfonso had scarcely time to hide himself among the ruins ere they appeared descending them—the friar anxiously watching every step of his penitent down the steeps.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“Solca nell’ onde, e nell’ arene semina,
E tenta i vaghi venti in rete accogliere,
Chi fonda sue speranze in cor di femmina.”—SANNAZZARO.

He ploughs in the waves, and sows in the sand,
And strives to catch the vagabond winds in nets,
Who founds his hopes in woman’s heart or hand!

The festival on the following day was diversified with a stupendous bull fight, given by the Orsini in their square of Navona; and thither the jubilants trooped in masses. The Orsini displayed their magnificence and wealth to a boundless excess in the exhibition of a sport in which the Spanish tastes of Alexander delighted, and in which their heir was famous for his dexterity. The whole square was built up to the first story with seats covered with rich cloths, surmounted by canopies and banners, above which were mostly balconies of the inhabitants, still more superbly decorated. A certain space of the square was railed off for the populace, whose curiosity despised the danger of an inrush from the terrible brutes who were to make the sport—not unfrequently in the manner of Samson diverting the Philistines. The station prepared for the papal court was of extraordinary splendour—a scaffolding hung with scarlet silk, in the centre of which was a pavilion of the same richly

coloured velvet, and lined inside with white satin, flowered all over with gold, and surrounded with network curtains of gold thread to preserve the degree of incognito which Alexander considered due to his double character of priest and sovereign.

Full of gloom and dissatisfaction, and with no thought of taking part in the scene, still the Hospitaller could not hinder himself from joining the throngs that hastened thither, but keeping secluded from observation among the masses of the vulgar who crowded the area. On his arrival he found all the points of view occupied, the pontifical court blazing in all its splendour in its gallery; and within the transparent pavilion Lucrezia, surrounded principally by ladies, sat with the pontiff—laughingly discoursing with a cavalier, who was almost the only one admitted, Sir Reginald le Beaufort! Alfonso inquired, and learned that the English knight had alleged a want of skill in the pastime—and yet he remembered to have seen him bear away great applauses in it, and that there was once nothing he loved better than danger and triumph of any sort!

The arena was strewed deeply with white sand, laid with rose-water, showered from the great fountain as often as the dust began to rise; and it was now covered with groups of horsemen on steeds of fiery mettle, bedizened with the colours of their mistresses and rich embroideries. Among these Cæsar and the Orsino were easily distinguished,—the former arrayed in black velvet decked with flame-coloured ribands, it was supposed, in honour of the Orsini; the latter in white, Lucrezia's colour, mingled with his own flame-tints and green, the colour of hope and spring. Plumes of corresponding hues set in knots of diamonds; short cloaks, white boots, and gilt spurs, with each a short sword and a quiver of darts at his embroidered girdle, and a light spear in hand—completed the accoutrements of the bull-fighters.

Sixteen cavaliers, including these chieftains, were presented by the marshal of the course before the pavilion of Lucrezia, to request permission to fight the bulls, in honour of herself and the ladies present. Sir Reginald opened the golden net, while Lucrezia and her attendant damoisells smilingly saluted the cavaliers. Alfonso noticed that the Orsino's homage was received with coldness, while Sir Reginald's open visage beamed all over with delight; and unluckily, Paschino, who was among the crowd, called out so as to be heard by all in his neighbourhood—“Ho, ho! yonder net it seems was not wrought by Vulcan, yet it has as pretty a pair within!”

“I give you fair leave, cavaliers, and wish you victory,” said Lucrezia, handing a large iron key to the Orsino, and speaking with some hesitation. “But how chances it the Knight of St. John is not among you? Does he fear to lose on bulls the renown he won on buffaloes?—Or reserves his strength to win the prize against us to-morrow?”

“Your grace probably knows better than I—I take little note of his movements, which are all under clouds and secrecy,” replied Paolo, moodily. Lucrezia bent haughtily, and the cavaliers returned to their places. The arena was cleared of all but those who were to engage in the conflict; the assailants took their allotted stations, lances were couched; all was silence and expectation, while Paolo delivered to the marshals the key of the massive byre or stable of unwrought timber, at a part of the square near the palace of the Massimi, in which the bulls were confined. To heighten the interest of the spectacle and the glory of the combatants, four of these ferocious beasts were ordered to be let out at once, although

more than one was scarcely ever ventured upon; and renowned as were all the cavaliers for dexterity in the sport, men awaited the entrance of the bulls with a vague feeling of horror, mingling with the absorbing delight of the expectation. So fierce were these creatures known to be that even their keepers, after unstocking the door, and throwing it open, raised the portcullis which still intervened, from above. Then with a dreadful clash of trumpets and kettle-drums, a hideous roar as the blaze of day and of the gorgeous scene fell upon their eyes, four prodigious bulls, all coal-black and covered with shaggy hair, rushed forth into the arena. The excitement of the spectacle overcame all Alexander's scruples, and he was now seen himself holding back the golden net, and hanging from his gilded seat with much more of the aspect of the Spanish Cid than of a sovereign priest, exulting in the terrible revel.

It is astonishing how uninterested the Hospitaller continued in the spectacle, amidst the universal uproar of delight and frenzied enthusiasm with which it was watched. He shared not the thundering acclaim which saluted the Orsino, when at the continual hazard of his life, and by displaying a marvelous horsemanship, he wreathed the horns of one of the most furious animals with Lucrezia's colours; when Cæsar, at a single blow, struck off the vast head of a Calabrian bull; when pressing his lance into the stubborn flank of one, his horse reared so high that it stood bolt upright, and he still sat it, laughing at the cries of terror among the ladies, and withdrawing his lance at the very instant when the strength of the bull became irresistible,—vaulted, steed and all, over its deadly rush!

Not satisfied with these displays, both Cæsar and the Orsino afterwards dismounted, and fought on foot, in company with a crowd of humbler combatants, who were exposed to much more danger; and incontestably the two carried off the glory of the day from all their competitors, and so equally that, but that Cæsar gracefully waived his claim in favour of his friend, Paolo, the judges would have been troubled how to have decreed the prize. It was a sword of the richest workmanship, the sheath being wrought in open gold work, with martial arabesques; and with this prize in his hand, nearly exhausted, covered with dust, but with a heart swelling with hope, the Orsino knelt before Lucrezia to present it to her as the lady of his love and chivalry.

The warm commendations of Alexander, who seldom restrained the instant's impulse, added to his satisfaction; and Lucrezia herself received the gift with a more cloudless smile than she often bestowed on her wooer. But with a much more sunny glaunce at Sir Reginald she extended her white and jewelled hand, and drew the sword which the Orsino held by the scabbard, though with some difficulty, on account of its weight; and the populace, struck by the contrast of her feminine loveliness with the gleam and terror of the weapon which she laughingly attempted to wield, raised an universal shout of joy and interest. It was, perhaps, for the first time on that day that Lucrezia had observed the Hospitaller, at least to his consciousness; but at this moment her eye flashed upon him, and with the utmost gaiety of tone she replied to the Orsino, "To-morrow, with this good blade will I du^o Knights of Love all who are willing to undertake his cause against reensants—chiefly the Knight of St. John. Meanwhile, since 'tis something too heavy an ornament for our proper girdle, and you are spent with the labours of your glory, we give it to the custody and porterage of Sir Reginald le Beaufort."

She offered the hilt as she spoke to the English knight, and Alfonso was convinced that she purposely held it so that his eager grasp partly pressed her hand as he clutched it.

The spectacle concluded with the appearance of four parti-coloured heralds, who with all the grandiloquence and pomp of their craft proclaimed a tournament to be held on the day after the following, in the Colosseum, given by the city of Rome in celebration of the Jubilee, and on occasion of the birthday of his holiness's niece, the most illustrious lady, Donna Lucrezia Borgia. Safety, honour, and fair play to all comers were solemnly pledged; a variety of stipulations declared against magical devices, treachery, or the use of certain prohibited arms; and finally, the prize was declared to be a diamond wreath, bestowed by his holiness, and valued at fifteen thousand Venetian ducats of gold, which, according to the general judgment of the ladies, of the Duke of Romagna, judge of the tournament, and of fifteen marshals, heralds, and pursuivants, was to be delivered by the same thrice noble and potent lady to the knight who best deserved it.

Even this magnificent announcement was eclipsed, when immediately after these heralds of the city of Rome had concluded, two in the coat-of-arms of the Duke of Romagna appeared in the square, and in his name invited the whole Roman people, and all the pilgrims who chose to attend, to a feast in his palace and gardens on the Capitol, and to witness a masque of the ancient gods. All who were skilled in the preparation or performance of these entertainments were invited with liberal promises to attend the officers of the duke's household in Santangelo—in especial one Dom Sabbat, of Padua, a learned clerk famously skilled in antiquities, and who was allured with great assurances to assist in the preparations of a triumph which the duke desired to exhibit on receiving the Gonfalonierate and consecrated rose decreed to him by his holiness, the people, and Senate of Rome.

The papal court then retired into the Massimi palace, to partake of a great banquet prepared by the Orsini; and in a mood of silent bitterness Alfonso returned—but certainly not to take his ease in it—to his inn.

He had spent nearly the whole previous night anxiously reviewing the events of the day, striving to persuade himself, that although some fearful suspicions had cleared themselves from Lucrezia, yet that her guilt in the worst was sufficiently proved. The jealousy of Cæsar, his reproaches and accusations!—the upbraidings of the monk addressed to Lucrezia herself on some dark and terrific crime!—which latter balanced any doubts which the Jewess's legend might raise on Cæsar's insinuations relating to the murder of his unhappy brother:—all these arguments were incessantly repeated by the Hospitaller to meet the thought which haunted him, that he had irrevocably offended Lucrezia. But now he more than ever needed such consolations as they could offer—for the result of his devouring observations at the bull-fight persuaded him that Lucrezia had transferred her licentious liking to one from whom she need apprehend rather a too violent return than a repulse.

With a soul stung all over, or rankling with these poisoned wasps of passion, Alfonso was in a very unsociable mood when, entering his chamber, and despoiling himself of his armour, he heard a tap at the door, which opening at his testy permission admitted—Fra Bruno. The pale and composed countenance of the Penitentiary yet bore traces of the severest mental agony, which kindled the Hospitaller's contempt and hatred

instead of pity, remebering with jealous bitterness the scene he had witnessed, and detesting the unhappy monk even for the ghastly struggle and the superhuman victory he had won. Moreover, he guessed his purpose, and felt his heart still more painfully touched by a proof of Lucrezia's interest in his fate, though at the same time he laboured to persuade himself that it had changed into a desire to remove so dangerous an inquisitor into her misdeeds.

The salutation was sufficiently cold on both sides; and after a very short preface, recalling the obligation under which the knight had laid him, Fra Bruno stated that he felt bound in return to inform him that his life ran hourly risk in Rome, the object of his embassy being suspected, and his ferretings discovered by personages whose vengeance, once provoked, nothing but blood could satisfy; and that therefore he earnestly implored him to make not a moment's delay, but hasten out of Rome and the power of his enemies.

"Fra Bruno, you are a monk, and insensible to human passions," replied Alfonso, with a covert sting. "If not, you could not dream that a soldier and a man, who had pledged himself as I have done to defy the wrath of the idolaters of your Roman Venus in to-morrow's tournament, would basely retire as if in terror from the redemption of his word."

"Therein do I chiefly fear for you," replied Fra Bruno with a slight flush. "I dread—and not without prompting reasons—that so glaring and public a scorn will exhaust the last drop of patience in the cup of the proud and merciless woman whom you have already, I find, exasperated to that pass at which her anger hath ever been found deadly."

"Proud and merciless!—deadly?" repeated Alfonso, adding with a sympathetic consciousness of where his stroke would deal sharpest, "But I trust and believe Dame Venus is at present too much absorbed in love matters with the blooming Knight of England to give immediate attention to the horrors, her more customary pastimes."

Fra Bruno smiled all over his visage, except the lips, and yet mental anguish in its most violent outbreaks never expressed so much of its own essence.

"Be it so, since you will not listen to the charmer, charm he never so wisely!" replied the friar, after a pause. "Pray, then, that you may suffer some great overthrow in the tournament to content the anger of your enemies. But if you meet with some misfortune in the meantime, the blame is not with me; neither can you altogether doubt from what hand it proceeds—and therefore not altogether blame a vengeance which, in truth, your own rashness and violence provoke."

Alfonso made no reply; but after the monk had retired, he dwelt with a continually deepening wrath and pain on the thought that in all probability he only spoke the truth; that Lucrezia now abhorred him; that her momentary liking was changed into the bloodthirsty revenge and hatred natural to a despised woman and a Borgia. Yet, in defiance of the threats held out to him, and to his own extreme fatigue and disgust, Alfonso again formed one of the tumultuous masses of the carnival; retired the latest to his abode; and on the following day was one of the foremost of the prodigious throngs who swarmed up the Quirinal on their way to the Colonna palace—laughing, gibbering, brawling, in all the effervescence of popular delight.

The observations which Alfonso overheard showed how well Cæsar understood the nature of the Roman populace; his praises were on every lip; he knew what was due to the Roman people; he was no Spaniard: it

was well the Colonna were banished, since their beautiful gardens were now thrown open to all the world; and scholars declared that it was a feast on the magnificent scale of an ancient Roman emperor, and that the grand days of the Roman people were returning.

Arriving at the gates, the masses poured eagerly in, and found their anticipations more than realized. If nature herself had spread the feast, she could not have been more prodigal than Cæsar's purveyors. The fountains flowed with wines, and kept the marble basins continually full, from which all were at liberty to help themselves; unnumbered tables groaned with the choicest viands; chesnuts and oaks were amazed to find themselves completely hung with clusters of the finest fruits, grapes, melons, oranges, figs; innumerable carvers were busy distributing fragments of oxen and boars, roasted whole, game, and immense pasties.

The eminence on which are the supposed ruins of the Temple of the Sun was appropriated to the most illustrious of the guests, and those who enacted Cæsar's pageant of the ancient mythos. In itself, its elevation rendered it not altogether an unfit Olympus, commanding all the spectacle below, the vast gardens swarming with countless multitudes as if the earth teemed with men like ants, and hemmed in by a wide amphitheatre of palaces, woods, vineyards, and illustrious ruins, half lost in the golden haze of noonday. The whole height was canopied with silk so palely blue that it could scarcely be distinguished from the heaven above; surrounded by couches whose voluptuous colours and softness well imitated the clouds on which the divinities of Homer were wont to solace themselves; and thronged with illustrious guests at a banquet which the gods might have left their nectar and ambrosia to share. Ascending to the scene in mingled defiance and curiosity, Alfonso himself stood amazed, among a mass of privileged gazers, at the more than Assyrian magnificence of the spectacle.

Alexander was the only personage present who appeared in his usual costume; but his majestic aspect, and robes, qualified him without any mythological insignia to represent the Father of the Gods. Cæsar enacted a Mercury, which his gay and yet astute countenance, brilliant, but licentious and cynical wit, admirably suited. By some it was thought that he had assumed this character because that Mercury was the messenger and instrument of his sire; by others in relation to the peace-making qualities of the god; and a sarcastic allusion was supposed to be couched in the twining serpents of his caduceus.

But Alfonso noticed little else after his eye had once fallen on Lucrezia—who enacted the part which all would have assigned her, but which, considering the attributes of the goddess and those assigned to herself, it looked like defiance of opinion to assume—that of the Queen of Love. She wore the skyey purple rob, starry with diamonds, which the ancients ascribed to Venus, clasped by a girdle of pure gold, to which hung the silver looking-glass—and with the golden sandals and crown of roses, the fresh bloom of her complexion, the warm perfume breathing round her; the laughter and triumph which sparkled in her eyes; the grace of her gestures; the winning sweetness of her voice,—united every attribute of the all-subduing celestial.

Beside her sat Signor Paolo, in passion and doting admiration, at least supporting the character of the warrior lover of Venus; while the Duke of Urbino performed that of the jealous and deformed husband with the skill of a comic actor of great ability. But Alfonso was more troubled to

observe that Le Beaufort performed the part of an Adonis at the laughing suggestion of Guidobaldo, eagerly adopted by the young barbarian when he heard the tale attached—and he looked the robustly beautiful hunter to admiration. And strangely well did Lucrezia enact her part of tenderness towards him; and indignation took possession of Alfonso's soul when he marked the bewildering effect of this coquetry on Le Beaulort. Cruel to the last degree, he *hoped* it was, and thought that it was a still greater proof of her diabolical nature, if it was not.

Cæsar had made no exceptions in his invitations—Vitellozzo figured as a Hercules, at no great distance from the Momus of Messer Niccolò. Bembo was there as an Orpheus, lyre in hand, and perhaps sonnet in petto; and an Alecto, who never laid aside her black mask, and well supported her mournful character, faced him with her knotted snakes fearfully stiffened out around her head.

Himself apparently unnoticed, Alfonso gazed with a burning heart on the spectacle; remarking that Lucrezia's gaiety was so extreme that at times it bordered on wildness. Glistening pages, golden vases, banners, flowers, the splendid canopy overhead which within was lined with gold rays spreading from the centre; the festal splendour of the gardens below; the moving masses of the rejoicing populace; their dances and reveries; the glorious landscape around; the wit, the laughter, the music, floated all indistinctly through his waking dream. Something he afterwards remembered of the Orsino's gaze fixed on him once with fierce scrutiny; some of the gibes of Machiavelli which moved incessant laughter, afterwards recurred to him; but all confusedly—wails of dreams. The banquet, long as it was, seemed to him to pass in a moment; and when the revellers arose—although the project had been for some time discussed among them,—he had only a strange vacant idea that they meant to go to a part of the gardens which overlooked the Corso to witness some kind of a race; but suddenly, when he found himself left almost alone on the eminence, he remembered that it was to be a foo-trace of the Jews!

The remembrance of Miriam came back with the word upon him. If the Jews were to run a race the Ghetto would be open; and if so, he might bring her forth to proclaim—what? He knew not. Something vaguely he thought of convincing himself that there was no room to doubt Lucrezia's guilt—to prove that Miriam's Francesco was not the Duke of Gandia—to overwhelm the whole Borgian race with doubt and terror—to satisfy himself by Alexander's conduct that he feared the detection of the murderer of his son!

Hastening down the acclivity, his eye caught the remote glitter of the court winding up to a marble terrace which overlooked the Corso, amidst the exulting acclamations of the well-feasted multitude. And looking after it with great intentness, he almost stumbled over the Alecto, whom he had noticed at the banquet, who was seated on a broken column belonging to the ancient temple whose ruins were around, with her mask off, as if to inhale the air more freely. In the momentary glimpse which he caught ere she could replace it, Alfonso saw a countenance which amply answered in its sculpturesque beauty and gloom the fury its owner personated.

“Divinity of Tartarus! may I pass without the offence you know so well how to avenge?” said Alfonso, for he felt that he could scarcely go on without some notice in common courtesy.

“If that be Greek for hell—in Italian it is memory!” returned Alecto, with intense and seemingly irrepressible bitterness. Pardon me, signor!

—but I should know. Let me not hinder you—doubtless as eager a worshipper as all the rest of mankind of yonder beautiful lady—most beautiful!—I dreamed not she was so beautiful!"

"There is something in your tone, lady,—nay, I am certain that the fair fury of to-day was the Fata Morgana of yesterday?" said Alfonso, suddenly struck with her voice.

"I have heard too that you mistook a dancing-girl for the lady of the Borgias," replied the lady, turning rapidly away. "But this I can truly assure you, knight,—whatever I was yesterday, or am to-day, a Borgia made me—even to the ruin around us!"

Leaving the Hospitaller to ponder this intelligence or enigma, the fury hastily disappeared, and he resumed his way.

In the Corso, Alfonso met the Jews who were to run the race, stripped nearly naked, their frames glistening with oil, and eager as gladiators, for the prize was exemption from a year's imposts and fines. Allowing them and their rabble to pass, Alfonso continued his route until he arrived in the Piazza Giudea, a square flanked on one side by the Ghetto. But here he encountered another and much more numerous crowd, the central figure of which caught his immediate notice.

Mounted astraddle on an ass, which was led by two sbirri of the city guard, her feet tied under it, and face turned to the tail, came a female figure, in a showy Jewish costume, whom Alfonso almost instantly recognized as Miriam. Some hallucination doubtless possessed her, for although the people kept up a continual sullen roar of derision and anger around her, her features were elate with joy and triumph, as if she were the chief personage of a fine procession.

The Hospitaller made his way through all the throng to the sbirri, and with much agitation inquired what they were going to do with their prisoner, and what she had done to deserve to be so.

"It is a Jewish harlot, signor, who managed to steal out with the runners, despite all orders to the contrary; and we are leading her for punishment before the Conservatorio," replied one of the axemen.

"Cut her to pieces!—the Jewish harlot that brings the plague among us!" yelled a woman whose own designation probably needed but to be changed in the epithet.

Two stout ruffians, seemingly retainers of some great house, drew their daggers, shouting "Death, death!" and such a gibbering tumult arose that for some minutes it was scarcely possible to distinguish a word that was said, the ass braying in concert.

"Peace, peace!" said the knight, waving his sheathed sword disdainfully to the rabble. "Vahant sbirri! mark you not that the poor girl is mad?—Leave her to my care, and I will see her restored to her home, without offence to any good Christian."

An universal laugh, and shouts of "Shame, shame!" showed in what light the populace took this proposal. But turning at the sound of his voice on her uneasy elevation, Miriam appeared to recognise him, for she clapped her hands in delight. "'Tis he!—'tis the dark cedar!" she exclaimed, rejoicingly. "I have kept my word, thou seest!—Lead me to him!—Where is Francesco?—For were I ten times a queen, I will be but his servant and loving slave!"

"Shame!—so likely a man to take such a part!" resumed the woman who had spoken. "But they make philtres and love-draughts in the Ghetto, and the poor handsome young man is bewitched."

"Death to the witch!" again resounded on all sides.

"Patience, my brothers!—whoever approaches within my sword's length shall taste its edge!" said the Hospitaller. "I tell ye again, the young girl is mad; but to content ye, I will obtain her dismissal before some competent presence."

The awe which the power and tyranny of the nobles and military diffused befriended the knight on this occasion. Murmurs indeed arose, and indistinct expressions of anger or disapproval, but no one offered any serious obstruction when the knight cut the thongs which fastened the Jewess's feet, made her turn to a more decent and feminine attitude, and led the ass on by the halter, desiring the shirri to keep on each side, himself watchfully observing the mob with a hand on his sword.

The intention which the adventurous Knight of St. John had formed was to lead the Jewess direct to the presence of the pontiff, and under pretext of craving justice on her behalf, ascertain if she recognised Cæsar, at the risk of whatever consequences might ensue.

But Miriam herself seemed likely to baffle his purpose. Far from any notion of detecting the murderer of her lover, she was possessed with a notion that she was being escorted with all possible honours to his palace and arms—reminiscences, probably, of some fair promises which love had lavished. Her satisfaction was so complete that it seemed a cruelty to attempt to break the illusion on which it was founded. Every object in turn attracted her delighted notice: she patted the ass, and kissed her hands at the mob incessantly, acknowledging their civility in accompanying her, but which they took to be a mockery of their baffled fury. The whispers in which the Hospitaller endeavoured to recall her wandering mind, necessarily close and earnest, also heightened their suspicious and indignation to the highest degree.

But in vain did the knight labour to dissolve the hallucination which possessed her: every stately building which they approached she concluded to be the palace of her unknown lover, and she stared with amazement when they passed without beholding him; the glittering confusion of the Corso was a festive pomp prepared for her reception, and the splendid groups of the papal court which appeared in the distance on a terrace overlooking it, convinced her that they were at length approaching her lover's presence.

"How may that be, Miriam?" at length exclaimed the knight. "Hast thou not told me thy lover is dead—slain by assassins in the Ghetto?"

"It was a dream—a dream! I had often fearful dreams, for I knew my people would have slain him and stoned me if they had seen his shadow!" she replied, impatiently. "But we shall easily know him: look, here are the flowers he is like—how withered they are!" she added, glancing at a nosegay in her breast. "Daffodils for his fair brow—pinks for his cheeks—musk for his breath—there was nothing red enough for his lips—but here's peach blossom too for his cheeks—and blue starwort for his eyes."

Reduced to despair by finding that no appeal to the realities of the scene could restore her to consciousness, Alfonso was scarcely sorry to observe that as they approached the terrace, and were desirous from it, an officer who commanded the guards ranged before it received some order, and rode towards them, shouting in a harsh and imperative tone, "Halt, all!" Alfonso immediately obeyed, and the populace paused too, but raising a tempest of cries, explanations, and demands of vengeance which drowned every distinct sound.

“What the foul fiend is this, scum?” said the horseman, still advancing, “that ye break into our lord his holiness’s diversions with your rude clamour? Is it a cut purse, or—what have we here?”

The commander’s vizor was raised, and Alfonso perceived that his sallow complexion grew nearly bloodless as he looked at the young Jewess. But before he could make any reply Miriam uttered a joyful cry of recognition, and exclaimed, “Take me to him!—take me to him! Sir Black Knight, you may leave me now in a blessed hour, for here is the stranger who came with the tidings of my Francesco. Son of a fortunate father! lead me to him, and thou shalt have gold, and spices, and frankincense, more than thy son’s son can use!”

“What is this?” stammered the rider, staring with mingled terror and amazement around. A hundred voices began to reply; but that of the Hospitaller quickly overpowered even the numerous rivalry.

“Señor Don Migueloto,” he said, “this girl is mad, but not so mad but that it is to be discerned she hath suffered a grievous wrong, either from her own people, or some monstrous villains of ours; and I have promised to lead her before our lord to demand justice.”

“I am not mad!—Art thou not come, good Christian, to lead me to my lord?” said Miriam, angrily, and looking with the eagerness of hope at the grim and fear-struck visage of the captain of Santangelo.

“Thou—she—Francesco!—how came this Jewish woman here?” he exclaimed at last.

“She stole forth with the runners—let us trust, not to meet her paramour, and to the shame of the holy cross this knight, who is a priest of St. John?” said the deep, melancholy, but now somewhat derisive voice of Fra Bruno who, enveloped in his cowl had mingled in the throng.

Migueloto took the hint, and wrinkling his brow terrifically, he turned to one of the sibiri, and demanded his account of the matter.

“Truly, my lord, we discovered the wench straying out of bounds, and the knight and she seemed well acquainted when they met, insomuch that he rushed against all odds to the rescue.”

The unanimous reiteration of the mob confirmed this view of the transaction, and Migueloto’s countenance gradually recovered some tints of life.

“It is death for any Jewish woman to leave the Ghetto during the Jubilee, more especially one of this wench’s trade, and like enough to bring down a heavy judgment on us all,” he said. “Go thy ways in peace, cavalier, and leave the harlot to the punishment that befits her offence. Honest men, whip her back to the Ghetto: but give her fair way, that she may make the best of her courser’s speed.”

This proposition was received with universal applause, many reserving to themselves the power of extending its provisions, while Miriam looked at the sentencer in vacant surprise and alarm.

“Sir Castellain, this shall not be—at least until his Holiness has heard her complaint,” said Alfonso, with difficulty bridling his wrath. “Some foul play hath been wrought against her—some Christian lover slain in her presence—she shall have justice!”

“Tis false!—it chanceth that I know the truth of the matter—she is forth to poison men’s ears with calumnies of the Jew dogs, her kinsfolk,” said Migueloto, fiercely. “It shames such a saint as you would have men think you—ay, and women too!—to be stirring in such a cause; but since she is your paramour, I tell you, knight, the only means to show your

kindness now is to drive her ass at a good speed, for until she reaches the Ghetto I give every man lawful leave to wreak his scorn on her!"

"I appeal to the pontiff himself!" shouted Don Alfonso, and so loudly that his voice probably reached the terrace. "Bar not my way, for I will make it through an army rather than suffer your bloodthirsty malice to prevail."

"What malice have I against the wench?" returned Migueloto, his complexion resuming its leaden tints beneath the eye of the Hospitaller. "Woman! hast thou ever seen me before, or I thee, that I should owe thee malice?"

The castellain had certainly not noticed the strange and varying expression of Mariam's countenance as he spoke; but when he turned and looked at her with his fierce protruding eyes, she uttered a shriek which rang over the whole Corso, and clapping her hands, and bissing as if to frighten away some direful animal, she shouted—"Murderer!" till the very sky seemed to echo with the crimson word.

"Upon her! hack her to pieces! It is the law—I will see it justified! Harm not the madman, but death to the Jewess!" yelled Migueloto, pressing his horse towards her; but stepping between him and his intended victim, the knight drew his sword, and waving it round him soon cleared a circle to some distance. But recovering from their panic, and encouraging one another with a loud shout of fury, the populace drew their daggers, and were certainly meditating an onset which all his courage could scarcely have withstood—when Master John of Strasburgh, accompanied by half a dozen halberdiers, appeared to command peace in his holiness's name, and with order to bring all the parties in the disturbance before him.

Alfonso most willingly obeyed, and Migueloto seemed afraid to offer any further opposition; so that lifting Miriam from the ass, half carrying half dragging her, he made his way to the terrace through the now unresisting masses.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glories of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away!"—SHAKSPERE.

"Remember all thy story—thy Francesco's murder—and demand justice at the feet of the venerable judge before whom I will place thee," said Alfonso, as they mounted the terrace; and Miriam, whose recollections were now rekindled in all their violence, shrieked "Justice, justice!" with frenzied eagerness at every step of their advance.

A moment before, the attention of the court and populace was absorbed in the victor of the race—who had fallen insensible with exhaustion as he reached the goal. Now all eyes and all curiosity was turned towards the strange spectacle of the Knight of St. John and the Jewess, bedizened in her tattered and disordered array.

Alexander was the only personage on the terrace who was seated, Cæsar standing by his chair on one hand, Lucrezia on the other, the court forming a glittering half moon behind. The masks, laid aside at the banquet,

were now all resumed; a circumstance rather favourable to the Hospitaller's intents, for a too sudden recognition of the murderer might prevent the hearing of the tale, and Miriam would seem only to rave.

Innumerable were the exclamations of astonishment and incredulity when the Hospitaller was clearly recognised, as he led the Jewess up the steps of the terrace. Alexander himself looked at the pair with amazement, and when Miriam prostrated herself with oriental homage at his feet, he exclaimed to the knight—"What fluttering jay is this?—a Hebrew convertite?"

"Holy father, you are to know that this is the Jewish girl whom I rescued from ruffians in the Ghetto, as your paternity may have heard it related; and whom I now bring to your feet to demand justice for a much more horrible fact," said the knight, notwithstanding a thrill even of his stout heart when he beheld the glance which Cæsar turned on the suppliant.

"What fact?—of what speak you? This is neither the time nor place; his holiness's justicers are men of approved integrity!" said Cæsar; and at the sound of his voice Miriam's whole frame trembled and clasping her hands on her forehead, she glared fixedly up at the masked speaker.

"Formal justice is too slow! Three years have elapsed since the deed of which we demand redress was perpetrated," replied the knightly advocate.

"Knight of St. John! 'tis more than rumoured that you are in Rome to gather matter of accusation and aspersion against the holy see," began Cæsar, when the pontiff interrupted him.

"Three years!—truly, it is as great an injustice to delay justice as to refuse it. We will hear and adjudge the matter if it be within an hour's compass, which we doubt not," said Alexander.

"But if it be some intricate matter of law, as it must be since your learned administrators have hesitated so long!" said Cæsar, when the pontiff again cut him short.

"Even so—myself served a full apprenticeship to the law," he said; "and during that time we observed what shall now persuade us that there is no nut in justice so hard to crack that lawyers must keep it turning in their mouths till the kernel is musty. Speak on, daughter of the tribes! we will hear thee—but be not too womanly in your discourse—that is, too long."

"But, holy father, if her argument runs against a Christian, she is a Jewess, and her evidence cannot be entertained," said Cæsar.

"If that be the law in Rome, from this moment we abolish it!" returned Alexander, with his usual vehemence. "But in what doth the spur gall you, nephew? Is the complaint against any ruffian whose lord supports instead of punishing his crime, as even too many of ye do?"

"Holy father, our plaint is of a murder committed three years ago—a secret, foul, and most treacherous murder—when the Duke of Romagna was a gentle cardinal—and therefore 'tis not like to attach to any of his religious following," said the Hospitaller.

"Three years ago?" said Alexander, with a darkening shade of memory passing over his broad forehead. "Secret, foul, and treacherous! Listen, sirs, with the end that all of ye may spare supplication, and none conceive the denial special to himself—I swear by the ashes of holy Peter that I will see justice done on this criminal, whoever he be, or ere I sleep to-night, were he as near and dear to me as our nephew here."

"This much I have gathered, then, holy father," said Alfonso. "This hapless girl had a Christian lover, whose quality and name were unknown to her, but who called himself Francesco; and who, from her confused report, must needs have been a noble of high rank."

"Tut!" interrupted Cæsar. "Is it the old story over again of the Christian paramour that was killed and pickled by the Jews for pork?"

"Francesco!—but go on, go on!" exclaimed the pontiff, very hurriedly.

"The story hath then reached your highness's hearing?" said Alfonso, concealing with difficulty the agitation which worked within him.

"Among many others which, since our dear and hapless brother met his mysterious doom, we eagerly clutch at, in the vain hope of obtaining some clue to vengeance," replied Cæsar, calmly. "But this story we found had no other foundation than the ravings of a mad Jew girl, whose relatives declared that she had never stirred out of the Ghetto during all her life."

"This mad Jew girl is now at your feet, most holy father; and for the sake of a dearer Francesco I implore you to hear what she can relate of the barbarous murther of her own!" said Alfonso. "Something she will speak disorderedly, as one whose mind is shattered by the blow of the direst calamity—yet not so wholly unpieced but that skilled eyes may join the parts."

"We will hear her," said Alexander, in a troubled and yet eager tone, a dark cloud gathering over his temples. "Arise, daughter, and speak as to a kind and pitying father. When and how perished your lover—your Francesco? By whose hand? If thy people slew him I will protect thee against their anger, and avenge thee so that—even to thy heart's content."

Miriam had continued kneeling during the whole dialogue, which perhaps she scarcely heard, so intently wrapt was she in considering Cæsar's person and habiliments. So lost was she in this scrutiny that she started when Alfonso gently plucked her girdle to recall her attention.

"Now, Miriam, speak!—Who was it bade thee summon thy Francesco—to baffle an appointment with some fair Christian dame?" exclaimed Alfonso.

"Where is he?—Oh, he is gone," she said, looking timidly round, and glancing over the whole multitude, whence, indeed, Migueloto had disappeared. "I never liked his black-bead eyes—and so I told Francesco; but he was so brave, and loved me so—he would needs stay! And so the moon was shining, and he was fast asleep—and first they tickled at the door—and I would not believe I heard any sound lest it should be the witches! But he came—he came!—The proud Christian woman with her diamond eyes could not win him from his poor Jewess—yet I saw them smiling together at the tournament when he kissed his hand at me,—poor fool! for it frightened me that the Christian marked me! But then he was so beautiful—where are my flowers?—This was his colour, my lord—nay, I thought I had a white rose too!—But it makes no matter; I can blow this open till you see the white at the bottom, and that will serve for his brow."

And she began breathing one of her roses open with the gentlest puffs, and yet with great anxiety to display the pallid tints in its depths.

"How long are we to listen to this pretty madness?" said Cæsar, casting himself into a careless and inattentive attitude.

"And was thy Francesco fair—very fair?" exclaimed Alexander, who to the contrary grew evidently agitated, and, to the grief of Burciardo, not only permitting the profane hands of the Jewess to cling to his knees, but bending over her so anxiously that his mitre touched the folds of her Jewish headdress.

"The moonshine on his face that night was no fairer!" said the Jewess, with a heavy sigh, and again looking with crouching and fascinated eyes at Cæsar.

"His hair!—what colour was his hair?" continued the pontiff.

"Brighter than these gold sequins, though I wear them for a remembrance," replied the Jewess; and heaving a deep sigh, or rather groan, Alexander threw himself back in his chair.

"And now, Miriam, remember! repeat the tale you told me of his murder!—remember how they tore him from your arms—your cries—their stabs—his long hair drenched in blood—and how they dragged the body away!" exclaimed Alfonso.

Uttering a wild shriek as the words struck on all the jarring strings of her memory, Miriam embraced the pontiff's knees in oriental supplication, and poured forth the dreadful revelation with such passionate vehemence, that, wild and broken as it was, the scene became almost visual in the painting of her frenzied imagination.

Alfonso kept his eyes fixed on the pontiff, and he observed that his powerful frame trembled all over with agitation; and his anxiety to hear the tale was so apparent—his emotion so great—that the knight could scarcely doubt that he suspected the murdered cavalier was his unfortunate son.

"The murderers were—masked!—wore the Christian dress! Oh, could I but think—the whole Ghetto, man, woman, and child, were all too few!" he gasped, when the Jewess broke off with frantic shrieks for justice. "Tell me truly—on thy life, tell me!—know you nought of this unhappy youth but that his name was Francesco!"

Miriam shook her head mournfully.

"Your paternity is listening to a mad woman!" said Cæsar, in a perfectly composed voice. "I did not think to bring so sad a recollection back to your holiness; but you must learn that when formerly I questioned this matter, her grandames told me that the amazing tidings of our dear brother's doom—the proclamation of his beautiful person to guide discovery—worked on this mad wench's brain even to believe the tale we hear—but wherewith while I live no man shall slander the memory of my brother, imputing to him a crime forbidden both in Heaven and on earth!"

"And yet—I will be free to tell your highness—that it was with some hope to throw light on that mournful business which gave me daring to bring it before his holiness," replied the Hospitaller, sternly.

"We are infinitely beholden to you, Knigh of St. John!—but all this is a stale legend," said Cæsar, continuing, in a mild and compassionate tone to the Jewess—"Alack, poor wench, thou dost not know that 'tis our Christian wont to throw away the flower when we have withered it with our evil breath. Art thou well assured thy Francesco did not abandon thee when thou hadst, as women think, given him even too much cause for faith?"

"Where is he, then?—lead me to him!—let me but see him, and then he cannot be so cruel!" exclaimed poor Miriam, frantically. "Do this, and I will give thee more gems than hang on a rose-bush at dawn."

"Your holiness hears!—but while we listen to the mad reverie, we forget that the world is listening too!" said Cæsar.

"And if some such crime has been committed—unless the Jews can disprove it—they can well afford to pay ten thousand gold crowns as a fine," said the Datary, gliding up to the pontiff's chair, and bending over to his ear.

"A fine!—ten thousand gold crowns!—Sell his blood for gold!—I will have them all put to the rack—to tortures infinite—till they confess who did it!" groaned Alexander in a harsh undertone, as if the words were drawn gratingly over his heart.

"On a mad woman's legend, holy father!—where were then your justice?" said Caesar, very calmly. "But even as your wisdom pleases—the Jews are no clients of mine!—only your paternity may remember the wench says her murderers wore the Christian garb. She hath not wit enough to turn the blame that way, or there's deeper instruction in it!" And he glanced malignantly at the Hospitaller.

"Miriam! were all the murderers of Francesco masked? or fell not the mask from the visage of the chief one in the struggle? For so she told me, illustrious signor," said Alfonso, with an ample return of the look; and then indeed Cæsar did slightly start.

"Is this true, Jewess?—speak, my daughter!—Dist thou behold the worse than devilish visage of one of the murderers?" said Alexander, with a wildness which contrasted strongly with his usual Spanish dignity and calm.

"One!—yes, the scarlet one!" said Miriam, with an insane breathless rapidity, as if she, too, comprehended that they were on the verge of a discovery.

"Let your holiness command all present to unmask, and we shall see if she recognises any one here!" said Alfonso.

"The farce grows somewhat dangerous," replied Cæsar, hastily. "Her madness is as like to hit on one as another, and thus darken some innocent person in our sunshine for ever. Nay, she is like enough to mark me, for look how she gazes at me, and speaks of scarlet because I wear it!"

"It were indeed too hazardous," said Lucrezia, for the first time speaking, in a low, horror-struck voice.

"Yea! and to prove what fearful fallacy were in the assay—I dare be sworn, for that our sister is by some held fair, if she unmask, this Hebrew shall avouch that she was the rival from whose arms she lured Francesco that night!" returned the duke scornfully.

"Nay, then, unhappy Hebrew, look on me! Am I thy rival?" said Lucrezia, rapidly clutching the mask from her beautiful and tear-bathed face.

Miriam started—tossed back her long black hair—and gazed at her with eyebrows rising like the back of a hyena, so fearful was the expression.

"Yes, yes, it was thou, murtheress!—it was thou who had him murdered for loving me much better!—it was thou, it was thou! Seize her, most venerable judge!—she murdered him—they told me so—for winning her Francesco!" shrieked Miriam, starting up, and but that the Hospitaller interposed, she would have rushed upon Lucrezia. "Now I remember, now I remember—the Scarlet Man told me they slew him by that proud murtheress's command, whom he deserted for me! Seize her!—seize her!"

"She is mad indeed—and we have listened too long to these ravings!"

said Alexander: but Alfonso noticed that his eye fell and dwelt with a moment's devouring suspicion on the aghast countenance of Lucrezia—and his own heart seemed grasped by a hand of ice.

At this moment a noise and movement in the crowd attracted the attention, though but dreamily, of the awed and panic-struck courtiers, who hardly dared to look in each other's faces lest their eyes should betray their thoughts. Two haggard old women appeared, strugling, screaming, and pushing their way through the mob, who buffeted them, plucked their long gray hair, and yelled—"The witches of the Ghetto!" while they made the air ring with cries of "Miriam, Miriam!—mercy on our child! she is mad, mad, mad!"

"Some kundred of the Jewess come to rescue their wandering idiot," said Cæsar, laughing outright with the wildness of overcharged feelings. "Note and M'rita in very troth! Here is your lost lamb, shepherdesses of the devil! Guards, rescue them from Christian buffeters, and bring them hither."

This order was given but in time to save the two old women from some violent marks of the popular hatred. As it was, they were dragged on the terrace from the mob with difficulty, and presented the wild and haggard appearance of two owls torn by hawks from their holes into daylight. The instant Miriam saw them she cowered down like a hare when the hounds are upon it.

"What forms are these?—of earth or hell?" said Alexander, as the hags prostrated themselves at his footstool.

"Of neither, please you, but of the Ghetto," replied Cæsar, hastening to encourage his allies. "Speak without fear, good grandames, and tell us what ails this wench; that she tells tales of murder and bloodshed as if it were the trade your family worked at?"

"Signor, we are two miserably poor, old, deformed, deserted, friendless women of the seed of Jacob, that live by honest midwifery, and some small skill in herbs inherited from our father, a wise physician," said Morta, raising herself with her hands in a ghastly attitude of supplication. "This is our father's son's son's daughter, and she is mad for the love of a Christian, who taught her sin, and left her repentance; deserting her as soon as the fruits of her guilt became manifest, whence she fell into a madness; and taking occasion from the name of the most noble lord, Duke Francesco, when his murder and the reward was proclaimed in the tents of our sojourning place,—waking one night from a fearfoul dream,—she would have it that it was her own base abandoner, and upbraided us poor, weak, miserable, aged, hopeless women, with his death."

"Ancient women! name to me the seducer, and the kings of the earth kneeling at our footstool shall not obtain his pardon from us!" exclaimed Alexander.

"Master and sovereign! he concealed all but the name—Francesco—even from his wretched leman, dreading the justice of your laws," replied Notte, with a smile which gleamed on her visage like phosphor on a skull.

"The punishment is death—your infallibility deems his crime deserved it?" said Cæsar, with extreme eagerness.

"Dismiss them—I am not well!" said the pontiff, gasping heavily for breath.

"Remove your unhappy child, good ancestresses," said Cæsar. "Me thinks, crazy as this wench is, she is too fairly moulded to keep much more of such holy company without scandal—yet though unsuccessful, his

holiness cannot but be grateful, sir Hospitaller, for the zeal you show in gratifying the great wish of all our hearts."

Noite and Morta sprang forward on their passive but trembling descendant, whose eyes, for the first time amidst the terrors of the day, expressed abject and physical fear. But Alfonso, although he felt that Lucrezia gazed at him with intense anxiety, and knew the motives which were ascribed to him,—raised her, and informed the bags that he would aid in escorting her back to the Ghetto, in a tone which a nod from Cæsar informed them they were not to dispute. Accordingly the whole group retired from the pontiff's presence, the Hospitaller carefully supporting the staggering steps of the Jewess, amidst general signs of wonder and disapprobation.

Still it might have been difficult for the Jewesses to pass through the enraged and muttering masses, if Fra Bruno had not joined the Hospitaller as he descended, and commanded the throngs to make way with his usual austerity and sway. With this assistance they gradually got clear of the Corso; but Miriam's memory seemed once more vacant of all its images, and she abandoned the Hospitaller's support, gambolling and singing before him, to the great scandal of those who continued to stare after them. The old crones spoke not a word, although they continued to glower vindictively at their escorters, until they reached the gates of the Ghetto, when they muttered a profusion of thanks and blessings pronounced much in the manner of curses, and seemed to decline any farther attendance. Fearing, in fact, that more interference would only exasperate her kindred against poor Miriam, Alfonso admonished them to forgive this strange vagary of her disease, which had also imposed on himself, and complied with their tacit desire.

Fra Bruno accompanied him as he retired, and as soon as the gates of the Ghetto had closed on the Jewesses, abruptly renewed his advice to the Hospitaller to quit Rome immediately.

"I know of nought which hath occurred to change my resolve before announced to you," replied Alfonso, impatiently. "To the contrary, in the earnestness of the pontiff to detect the murderers of his son—after what has passed between us, father, you will understand me."

"Yea!—but you have hovered on the verge of a more direful secret. Be wise in time; women provoked to extremity are more relentless than men, as water petrified is harder than natural stone" replied the Penitentiary, with an innuendo which, coupled with Miriam's accusations, produced a powerful effect on Alfonso.

"I will but tarry to rebuke the pride of yonder malapert English boy, who imagines that no Italian can resist him and his tricks of lass," he replied; but in the same flash of thought, remembering Miriam's recognition of Migueloto—her allusions to the Scarlet Man—the boatman's story—and the reasons he had to distrust the Donini—an, his smothered passions boiled up into rage against the latter. "And then, friar," he continued, with a glance which obviously startled the confessor, "Then—I will leave the field, though it be of thies and roses, clear to *ye all*."

"Clear—to us all!" exclaimed Fra Bruno, starting, almost insanely, at the knight.

"E se wherefore did a certain great man attempt your life?" returned the Hospitaller. "If you would not have me explain myself far her, trouble me with no more of your importunities; for, sain as you are, I doubt not the people would be amazed to hear all that might be related of your long interview in the hermitage on the Aventine—when thunder

only—the thunder of a brick pressed out of its place by one who was determined to be convinced of your innocence,—prevented you from at least attempted guilt!"

Fra Bruno's aspect, as these words were uttered, was so terrific in its agony of shame, remorse, fear, doubt, and wrath, that Alfonso himself was troubled at beholding it.

" Rest content—I will not betray you; but dare not to betray me, since thou seest what I can return upon thee!" he said, hurrying away; but looking back once at a considerable distance, he perceived Fra Bruno still standing, rooted to the spot; and somewhat repenting his own inconsiderate fury, he continued his route.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LA GIOSTRA FURIOSA.

" Oh, holy St. George! O very champion!
O undefyled and most holy Knight!
O gemme of chivalry! O very emeraud stone!
O loadstar of loyalty! O diamond most quyght!
O saphir of sadness! O ruby of most right!
O very carbuncle! O thou mantesse of Ynde!
Graunte me thy helpe—thy comfort for to synde!"

Old Lines, quoted in Dugdale's Baronage.

The day of the tournament—the festival most anxiously expected by the warlike pilgrims of all those which the magnificence of the Borgias provided or promised—dawned with congenial splendour. The ceremonies of the day commenced with the exhibition of a Roman triumph, in which Cæsar went to the Capitol to receive the investiture of the Gonfalonierate, habited like the first who made the name glorious and ominous for ever. Alfonso was among the gazers, curious to witness with what degree of firmness the duke would assume the insignia of his slaughtered brother; and he quailed not once. He refused, indeed, to assume the robes of the office, and went bare-headed through the ceremonial, as a mark of his respect to the senate and Roman people—two fictions which were supposed to have conferred the honour—until a woman, who represented Destiny, no less in her stern beauty than in her array, who came whence no one knew, nor by whose command, descended from the tower of the Capitol, and crowned him with a wreath of laurels, at the same time pronouncing a gorgeous prophecy of his future achievements, in which she did not scruple to promise the restoration of the ancient Roman grandeur in his own, as emperor of a people who required only such a leader to become once more all that they had been! The enthusiasm of the populace was visibly kindled by these splendid promises, but Cæsar replied only with a smiling and modest abnegation; and the pomp concluded by the senators, magistrates, and all the orders of the city conducting him to receive the confirmation of his dignity in the Vatican.

Alfonso immediately remembered the features of the Destiny to be those of the lady to whom he had spoken in the Colonna gardens, and of the Fairy Morgana; and now, concluding that she was some instrument of Cæsar's, the Prince of Ferrara was alarmed at the proclamation of an ambition so boundless; for doubtless, beneath this seemingly unconcerted adulation his real hopes and intentions were insinuated. His regrets at

the impossibilities to which he had himself added of an alliance with the power most capable of curbing these dangerous designs, served now only to increase the desire which possessed him of giving the death-blow to all hope by putting the crown on his offences to Lucrezia, and winning from her champions the triumph she coveted in the tournament. A burning jealousy of Le Beaufort, who alone he believed likely to wrest the victory from him, heightened the feeling to a kind of frenzy.

He returned to his inn to arm himself, and partake of some needful refreshment: for which latter purpose his host produced some fruits and wines of finer quality than any the Hospitaller had yet tasted in his abode. He therefore ate and drank more heartily than was his wont—perhaps to strengthen the resolution which was continually melting in his heart. When he had done, and was commanding the viands, while the host assisted his squires to arm him, the good man, who was pleased with the manners and liberality of his guest, could not forbear telling him, under great injunctions of secrecy, that the repast was sent to be served to him by some lady—who it was he knew not, but the Hospitaller could probably guess, and so the man-at-arms who brought it had averred.

At first Alfonso was almost vanquished by this last proof of the generosity and tenderness of Lucrezia; and his enamoured fancy dwelt with delight on renewed hopes—but gradually he began to feel a species of languor and inertness creeping over his whole frame, and slight convulsive trembles shook his joints which he had great difficulty in concealing from those who armed him. It was long, however, before the direful thought occurred to him, which finally—when his squires had retired to prepare his steed, and, the excitement of their presence gone, he felt an almost invincible necessity of yielding to sleep,—rushed upon him that he was poisoned!

Poisoned, and by Lucrezia!—when these two thoughts conjoined first sprang upon his soul, for some moments its reasoning faculties deserted him. He tried to persuade himself that he was in a dream, and strove to waken from it. Consciousness and memory, however, would not thus be cajoled out of their victim; and it was amazing in what brief time, and with what vividness all that could render death itself terrible, and this death most terrible, rushed upon his imagination! He had just discovered Lucrezia's innocence of some of the most heinous charges against her, and the fall of parts had shaken the whole fabric of accusation; he felt that she had loved him, who now hated him so much as to have contrived his death; he had raised to himself, by his own implacable coldness and arrogance, a rival who, if Lucrezia had spoken the truth against herself, would not long sigh in vain. His fancy raised an instantaneous vision of the tournament, in which Sir Reginald rode victor in the triumph at once of love and chivalry, securing the rewards of both! His own absence to be regarded as a proof of cowardice, a confession of inability to maintain his vaunts against the glorious minion! And he meanwhile a prince, wooed by all the delights of existence; a soldier and a statesman full of noble projects:—to perish miserably by a wanton's hate!

Those who had prepared the drug, which was evidently of an opiate nature, had either not calculated that the knight would partake so largely of it, not intending the operation to be immediate, or had not sufficiently allowed for the counteractive power which the violent passions kindled in his blood offered to its preliminary stupor. Instead of yielding to the lethargy which had oppressed him, his whole frame tingled with a burn-

ing fever of wrath; and after using such simple remedies as the host suggested, on learning that he feared he had eaten some poisonous insect in the gum of a too ripe peach, he felt that the worst symptom was past. Langid, giddy, and enfeebled, indeed, he remained, and most unfit for the task which he meditated, but resolved to appal and vex the guilty eyes of Lucrezia with his apparition in the lists from which she had sent Death to keep him!

Still he was not so insensible to his own safety, but that he resolved, in the first place, to procure some efficacious antidote, and to ascertain with what poison the wine was compounded, in which he believed he had taken it. Unwilling to trust any one with his suspicions, he left the inn under pretext of slightly breathing himself and his horse; and knowing that the prohibition relating to the Ghett^o was now expired, he hastened thither, thinking at once to propitiate the Jewish hags with the gold they so eagerly sought, and confident in their skill in the dismal branch of pharmacy the effects of which he had experienced.

He found both Notte and Morta in their shop or laboratory, engaged in sorting heaps of withered camomile and other flowers useful in their art, while Miriam sat at their feet, occupied intently in the same toil, and singing, or rather twittering in imitation of some rare bird, which was beside her in a little gilded cage shaped like a mosque. The apothecaries were obviously startled, but although Miriam gazed up at the knight, she gave him not the least sign of recognition or recollection.

Both the cronies snatched at the bottle at once, when Alfonso presented it with a desire that they would tell him if there was any poisonous mixture in its contents, and he saw with satisfaction that they exchanged looks expressive of anger to find that their trade was exercised by others. But as soon as Notte had tasted it, she spat it out with the scorn of an experienced vintner tasting a bad wine. "Morta, drink it!—Drink a cupful of it: it will not harm thee, child!" she said, laughing derisively. "What fearful fool hath mingled this? Go not to him again if thou wouldest buy death."

"Fool, fool thyself, how thou pratest!" said the more profound Morta. "A hand as subtle as our fathers' has seasoned this draught! no flavour, albeit the potent red dragon is in it! yet death could scarcely have been intended, unless in a watery blood! It is of such stuff as we sell to curious rivals, who would have the bridegroom fall asleep at the wedding feast. Unless some qualm foil it, he who takes a draught of this is but the show and presentment of a man!—powerless! his enemy shall strike him down with the shadow of his spear."

"My dishonour, then, if not my death, was intended!" said Alfonso inwardly, and the thought was the more bitter, adding to Morta, "One whom I friend hath swallowed this potion—canst thou give me aught that will restore him to his powers, he it but for a few hours?"

"That hath been provided against—only beware that they bury not thy friend alive, for if the stupor is upon him, it will last itself out, sometimes sinking into the reality, but always wearing the semblance of death, if once soaked into the brain!" replied Morta; and Alfonso, who had indeed some doubts whether an antidote from such hands might not be as dangerous as the original draught, amply rewarded the hags, and retired, without venturing to solicit Miriam's attention.

The hour named for the tournament was now at hand, and though he felt scarcely able to support the weight of his armour, Alfonso delayed

not to follow up his heroic determination; and his sable panoply was not among the last to appear among the multitudes thronging to the scene of action.

It was in the spot where the ancient masters of the Roman world had displayed their most prodigal splendour, that it pleased their modern imitator to exhibit his own,—in the Colosseum. One again the vast ruin was filled with gazing myriads, all its galleries, shattered and destroyed as they were in parts, being occupied to the highest round by prodigious crowds of the jubilants.

It was very possible to believe for some instants, until the recollection was struck with the unclassical costumes of the congregated nations, that the days of the Roman empire had returned, and that those innumerable spectators were assembled to behold some colossal display of the cruel magnificence for which the amphitheatre was built. It is true that the first circle above the arena was no longer occupied by a Roman emperor and senate, the golden knights and the vestal virgins, and the priests of a thousand gods; but a scaffolding of gilded poles, hung with purple velvet, and canopied with cloth-of-gold, concealed the ruins of the imperial gallery, and accommodated the pomp of their successors. The pontiff occupied a throne which was ascended by several steps in the centre of this gallery; while Cæsar, habited still like a Roman consul, sat as judge of the field in a curule chair below, environed by a semicircle of ladies, his assistant jury, beyond which rose seats in gradation, filled with the most distinguished personages of the court—cardinals, princes, nobles, ambassadors, and illustrious jubilants.

Beneath this gallery and around the whole lowest range of the amphitheatre were hung the shields of all the knights who intended to join in the day's dangerous pastime—each watched by a trusty squire, with his master's banderol floating on a lance. The grim visage of William of Bampton was conspicuous among all, stern, and expressive of little satisfaction in the spectacle; for in truth his master's delay in accomplishing the object of his journey to Rome had for some time given him great uneasiness. The arena was cleared of its chief obstructions in fallen ruin or herbage, strewn deeply with sand, and kept vacant by the exertions of a multitude of kings-at-arms, heralds, and marshals, and the crossed spears of a numerous guard at all the entrances.

Above the ground gallery arose the second grade of the amphitheatre, its weed-overgrown corridor, concealed beneath scarlet cloth, and densely occupied by spectators in the most various and sumptuous costumes. The effect was very magnificent and gay, for among them mingled a great number of women in the diversified and picturesque garbs of almost every state in Europe, certainly of every city and province of Italy, from the Juno-like robed Sicilian, to the half-naked Venetian, scandalizing her muffled Lombard neighbour with bare bosom and arms.

Although the Colosseum in the fifteenth century had not yet fallen into the grandeur of ruin in which it is now beheld, was not yet turned into the quarry whence the modern architect procured his materials, still the third tier of galleries, occupied as of old by the populace, was in many parts so dilapidated that it presented only zig-zag masses of spectators, some of whom seemed perched so high that they might touch the heavens with their hands. And those heavens!—a sea of blue becalmed—bright, lustrous, intense blue, whose transparent and motionless concave overhung the spectacle like a dome of sapphire. Lucrezia's popularity was

very visibly displayed in these steeps occupied by the Roman populace, for in honour of her birthday, almost every one either carried a nosegay or wore a wreath of flowers; and as the Orsini marriage was approved by the people because it promised her tarriance in Rome, a vast number had decorated their breasts and caps with flame-coloured ribands streaming in the air, which, with the rich colours of the flowers that seemed to have exhausted the gardens of Italy, whose fields are such, glowing in the now meridian sun, gave the summits of the amphitheatre the many-tinted radiance of a peacock's tail.

The popular feeling was still more plainly evinced when Lucrezia arrived, heading the immense cavalcade of the knights, as Queen of the Tournament. Before her was borne, on a crimson cushion, by two kings-at-arms, attended by a dozen trumpeters with silver horns, and as many heralds, the splendid prize—a wreath of diamonds set with admirable skill, so as at once to form a most graceful convolution, and the words—“To the bravest—the fairest!” She rode a snow-white charger full of fire, but docile to the least gesture, as if he, too, loved his beautiful mistress, tossing his plumed head high in the air, sporting, and arching his neck till his nostrils blew the foam off his broad breast and slender forelegs. The housings were of white velvet, sown with pearls, and Lucrezia's robe was of the same virgin-hued satin, wrought at the bosom and down the whole front with a cross of diamonds; her train was of a light rose-coloured velvet, strewed with ruby stars, and borne by six pages; but the only ornament which she wore on her head, beside its glory of golden ringlets, was a garland of white roses. A canopy of silver damask was borne over her by two knights—the Orsino and Sir Reginald.

The former might have been styled, and indeed generally was, throughout the day—the White Knight, so elaborately had he covered himself with the colour of his lady's choice. His very armour, overlaid with plates of silver, shone white; his surcoat, but for the crimson heart wrought in the centre, was white; his shield was white, with a sufficiently blank motto—“This or love!” The bear on his crest was white—lance and scarf, and sword and belt all white—and truly it might be added that his visage was so too, though set with an expression of fixed determination, which promised as stout deeds of arms as the hilarity and joyous colour on Le Beaufort's.

But there was something more of the experienced tourneyer in the English knight's appearance. His powerful and yet supple limbs were sheathed so perfectly in the steel which cased them, that the play of the strong muscles and vigorous sinews could be as plainly discerned as if he wore only silk, and displayed indeed a person whose youthful grace, activity, and strength, were of the kind which is said to win most favour in the eyes of women, the full energy of manhood not yet developed into coarseness. He bestrode a mighty English steed, embarrassed with no panoply but armour, and a plume of lofty broom flowers, and a dazzling effect was produced by the innumerable suns emblazoned in the steel, and especially one on his own breast, in the midst of which was the cheerful motto—“Of the sun indeed!”

We should need the pen of Homer (if he had one), and the privileges conferred by three thousand years of immortality, to venture on a descriptive catalogue of the innumerable chivalry which formed the cavalcade, and which extended as far as the topmost spectator could view—a tossing mass of glittering armour, helmets, plumes, and prancing steeds, and showy surcoats, and mingled blazonries of every land! All halted

when Lucrezia had reached the arena until she ascended to a throne prepared for her in front of the fair jury, amidst a thunder of delighted acclamations, in which Alexander himself could not forbear audibly joining. The Orsino and Sir Reginald then took their stations beneath the throne, and a universal flourish of trumpets invited the knights to continue their advance.

But for the order in which the marshals grouped them as they entered, even the vast area of the Colosseum could scarcely have contained the numerous aspirants to the honours of that illustrious day. And yet it is probable that not one escaped at least a momentary notice from Lucrezia as they crowded in; so that when at length the Hospitaller entered in his dark panoply she observed him instantly. The whole amphitheatre was between them—but she started as if with an electric shock at the terrible glance which met hers, and stared indeed for several instants as if she had beheld a spectre newly risen from the grave. This proof of guilt reanimated the sinking powers of the Hospitaller, and few of the wine-flushed and holiday warriors rode with more stalwart dignity into the arena than the half-poisoned and soul-exhausted Knight of St. John.

The masses were at length concentrated—silence proclaimed—and a herald with stentorian lungs declared the conditions of the tournament. All who engaged in it were to be noble both by father and mother, of legitimate birth, untainted with any crime or dishonour, not excepted against by any lady or damsel, and unassisted by any supernatural arms or defences. The weapons to be used were blunt lances of ash, the back edge of the sword, or axe, and unpointed daggers; no stroke below the girdle was to be considered lawful, and to kill a horse deprived the offender of his own, and of all claim to the prize. The combat was to be that of the Mèlée or Medley, which imitated the confusion of a battle, and was usually adopted when the number of candidates for glory was very great, as on the present occasion, observing of course some distinctions, which, although the laws of this burly burly contest were generally known, were recited, that no one might pretend ignorance. Each onset, or in modern fisticuff phrase, round, was to last three lances—that is, each knight, if he were not disabled, in addition to the lance with which he commenced, might use two more, held in readiness by his squire. Whoever unhorsed an opponent, provided that he was not himself thrown three times, might enter in the next onset; and whoever, after having used his three lances, failed either to overthrow an adversary, bend him back in his crupper by strength of lance, or strike off his helmet, was to quit the conflict altogether. No two or more knights were permitted under the most severe denunciations of ignominy, scorn of the ladies, and forfeiture of arms and horse, to assail one at the same time; and as the confusion and violence of these tourneys nearly resembled those of a battle, the squires were exhorted to win themselves honour, and to show how nobly and dexterously they could serve their masters in that more perilous conjuncture, by removing the fallen from the press, helping them to remount, furnishing them with new lances, unclasping their vizors to allow them breath, and other services of the like nature.

The herald concluded by announcing punishments for proved transgressions of these rules, and by inviting all the gentle chivalry whose hearts were animated by love, to be admitted into an order of knighthood which he was pleased to found, and had deputed his Queen, the Lady Lucrezia Borgia, to confer on all who desired to enter it.

This proposition was received with a deafening shout of approval from the warriors, echoed by the whole assembly save one or two; and the manner of the initiation was indicated by Paolo Orsino, who eagerly claimed his right to be the first received in it. "Be it so—and Sir Reginald shall be the last!" said Lucrezia, smiling as the young knight knelt to present to her the sword which she had confided to his care. Drawing the weapon with his assistance, she advanced to the edge of the platform, and slightly laid it on Paolo's shoulder, as he bent deeply on his war-horse to receive the distinction, and he then passed on, in an order previously arranged, and a concourse of the eager chivalry followed, who all pressed to the gentle stroke with enthusiastic rivalry, many of them earning at the same time some precious favours from their lady-loves in the gallery—such as scarfs, knots of riband, jewels, and other ornaments.

The throng around the Hospitaller rapidly thinned, as the innumerable knights of love hastened to enrol themselves in his chivalry; and, at length, looking up from a disordered reverie, he found himself nearly alone—only two knights adhered to what seemed to be a forlorn cause. The great bulk of one of these revealed him to be Vitellozzo—the other quickly revealed himself.

"By my faith, Knight of Jerusalem! seeing that we owe one another but little now, I am well content to stand by you in your quarrel against the Borgias!" said Oliverotto da Fermo, with a strange smile.

"Among us—if sinews carry it, we may surely binder the proud strumpet of her will for once," said Vitellozzo, with his habitual brutality and violence. "And yonder galliard boy whom she hath taken so fairly in her meshes—look! she leans upon his goodly shoulder as he kneels, for weariness, no doubt,—fie, wanton!—if I bring him not to the ground like a winged mallard—look! she makes a dint in the steel with her amorous paddling—but, by my saint, his bones shall ache too much for it to-night, damsel!"

"She counterfeits a faintness—inhuman perfidy!" groaned the Knight of St. John. "But, lord Vitello, I pray you of your gentleness, let me first try my fortune with him—and I care not what else befalls."

"I will not yield my hope to make all that snow puff with grief that now swells with amorousness, for as much gold as would roof Castello!" returned the burly chieftain.

"And by your beard, Vitellozzo, I will have my stroke to despoil him of that fair sword—look, she gives it to him!" exclaimed Oliverotto.

"Good knight, its work is done!—wear it for my sake," were indeed the words which now came to their ears, pronounced by Lucrezia as she handed the weapon to Sir Reginald. "Do me some gentle strokes with it to-day—and keep it for thy rougher sports for ever!"

Delighted almost to ecstacy, Le Beaufort kissed the fair hand that bestowed the gift so passionately, that a general titter arose among the ladies; in the midst of which, vaulting from the platform on his steed with matchless dexterity, the knight dashed it forward into a magnificent charging attitude, and flashing the sword over his head, shouted till the arena rang again, "Lucrezia against the world, with either edge!"

"I accept the challenge," replied a still louder cry, and the Hospitaller galloped furiously forward, throwing his lance on the ground, drawing his sword, and striking it with such frenzied rage against Le Beaufort's, that sparks flew all around, and the young knight, not expecting such an onset, scarcely retained his hold.

"Why, brother-in-arms! what is this?" said Le Beaufort, dropping the point of his weapon the instant he perceived who his assailant was, and in that brief pause Alfonso's reason had returned.

"Ha, ha! 'tis but to show ye, Knights of Love, we of Honour are of good cheer yet!" he said, laughing hoarsely. "You vaunt it too proudly over our feyness—but few as we are, ere night, I promise,—some both wished and intended we should be fewer."

Sir Reginald laughed good humouredly, though he perceived not the wit of the allusion. "Let us to deeds, then, brother!" he exclaimed. "My heart is getting too impatient for its mew, and there is nothing pleasanter than the clashing of tournays except the real burly burly of battle. Largess! largess!" and with this cry he threw a handful of gold among the heralds and pursuivants, an example which was immediately followed by all the chivalry as a reward for the exertions of the meritorious functionaries, and a signal that they desired the lists to be cleared for deeds of arms.

While the heralds collected their rewards into a common heap for future division, Cæsar stood up, and commanded the kings-at-arms to divide the arena with a rope of curiously rich dyes, which they held up at a distance of about thirty paces from the opposite entrances of the Colosseum. The knights were then requested to ride out at the entrance towards the Palatine, and turning round the amphitheatre, to re-enter at that of the Esquiline, each jousting, taking an opposite side of the rope to that of him who preceded, so as to divide the whole chivalry with all possible fairness of chance. This formed no small portion of the amusement of the spectators in the amphitheatre, and also of a great multitude assembled outside, who were only enabled to see the knights in this procession, and to hear the triumphant music to which they marched.

Although strenuous commands had been issued that no one should presume to disturb the pomp of the spectacle with outcries, gestures, or other intimations of opinion, the chatter, the laughter, the shouts, continued so incessantly, that, as there was no instant of silence to contrast, not even the all-important and all-interfering marshals noticed it.

In a brief space the combatants were arranged in two solid squadrons along the whole length of the arena which, vast as it was, could scarcely contain them—the oldest and most experienced knights averring that, except in the marshaly of great battles, they had never seen so many renowned and illustrious crests opposed. A clear space of about a hundred feet was reserved between these masses to give sufficient impetus to the shock of their encounter, which was diligently kept by the sergeants-at-arms. And now the division was nearly completed, only one knight remained to be placed who had purposely reserved himself that he might be sure to get into the rank opposite to Sir Reginald, and this was the Hospitaller, who, lingering in his transit round the amphitheatre, suffered a new annoyance when he was at length about to enter it. Paschino called to him with the familiarity of an old acquaintance, from the top of a conical ruin, which is said to have been a fountain, where he had perched himself in a vain hope of seeing something of the spectacle within. "In mercy's name! do but gratify my curiosity, knight! to tell me who occupy the seats of the vestal virgins? Give me argument for eternal laughter, and say—'tis Lucrezia and her ladies!"

"Laugh on then, little spider, till thy venom bag bursts and chokes thee with thine own bitterness!" replied the angry knight, passing into

the arena. Discerning at a glance on which side Le Beaufort was posted, he checked his rein towards the opposite, but was immediately met by the truncheons of the marshals ; and then as if the whole multitude had fathomed the secret of his soul, and derided its incongruous nature, so loud a shout of laughter arose that the immense ruins seemed to shake as if with an earthquake.

But the matter was explained almost at the very instant when Alfonso was about to make some furious outbreak. “ Give the odd man to us, marshals, in common fairness ; no two of us can match the lord of Castello ! ” said Le Beaufort, unconsciously, by the laughter which the gibe provoked, adding to the animosity of his fellow-guest, which his open nature did not suspect, and who, being in the opposite ranks, had managed to post himself in front of the English knight.

“ Take him then to your own aid, for I mean to try my lance on you, sweet gentleman ! ” replied the gigantic chieftain, fiercely.

“ Take advice, and do not—for one such fall as I can give to knights of your flesh puts them to bed for a month ! ” replied the knight, somewhat offendedly.

“ Sirs, this may not be—we must appeal to his highness the judge of the field ! ” said a grave king-at-arms, who had advanced, and who accordingly bastened to Cæsar’s throne.

He returned in a few minutes with the duke’s decision that until the combatants already ranged became odd by the chances of the conflict the Hospitaller must remain out ; consoling himself with the advantage in the reservation of his strength. Meanwhile the duke desired him to take his station near himself, to assist him and the ladies in the judgment of the field.

Knowing that it was in vain to resist, and feeling at the same time a relapse into an extreme weakness. Alfonso tacitly obeyed, and half unconsciously found himself posted beside Cæsar, listening to his condolences, and immediately under the eyes of Lucrezia and her ladies.

Alfonso’s strength returned with the violence of his indignation when he perceived that she looked at him with an instant’s intense wondering and sorrowful gaze—doubtless to mark and regret the little mischief her potion had wrought, for he knew not that his visage was so deadly pale !

“ Welcome, Sir Dolorous ! ” said Cæsar, smilingly. “ But that it might ill become me to contend with my guests, I would have sided with you, merely out of spite to the women, who have given me so many restless nights ! but now I see why they were nigh killed with laughter yesterday when your English brother described to them a manner of sport they have in his land called a cock-fight, thinking of their own to-day,—for ‘tis nothing other ; and mark you not how each watches her chanticleer as eagerly as if she had staked a dozen gold crowns on his mettle, and how the proud birds purfle and stalk ? But you have not saluted our fair hens at anxious roost above ! ”

“ It were a lost courtesy—their souls are in the lists below, ” replied Alfonso, gazing, and yet scarcely noticing anything in the scene before him.

The spectacle was now at its greatest point of splendour : the two lines of the opposing combatants were on the eagerest strain of the start, lances fixed, bending forward in intense expectation, their steeds tossing and foaming with impatience, and all their panoply and plumes one restless mass of glitter, colour, and flash. But the Hospitaller remembered no-

thing very distinctly afterwards, until suddenly the cry of the heralds “Let do!—let do!” the crash of a thousand warlike instruments—the simultaneous shout and rising of the vast assembly—the flying away of the rope—announced the decisive moment of the onset! The next instant and the cloud of sand tossed from unnumbered hoofs—the clash of armour—the splintering of lances—the fall of rider and man—the cries of squires and pursuivants—a deafening uproar of acclamations, shrieks of women, neighing of horses, triumphal bursts of music—declared that the passage of arms had commenced! Among a hundred saddles instantly emptied, Alfonso saw only that the mighty Vitellozzo was hurled over, steed and rider, beneath the lance of Sir Reginald—and that, continuing his career, the English knight overthrew three more in succession, among whom was the adventurous Oliverotto.

Such of the overthrown as could rally their energies, assisted by the squires, caught their horses and remounted; those who could not were raised by the same faithful attendants; but true to his promise, Sir Reginald had sent Vitellozzo to the ground with such violence that he was taken up insensible and bleeding from eyes and ears, his great bulk with difficulty carried off by half a dozen squires, like a bull’s from the arena. And this exploit was signalized by an audible exclamation of satisfaction from the pontiff. But Oliverotto quickly recovered himself, and seemingly bent on vengeance, seized a new lance, (his own was broken against Le Beaufort’s shield,) leaped into his saddle, and rushed round to meet Sir Reginald, who was continuing his exploits with a success which amazed the Italian spectators, and drew down incessant shouts of applause and wonder. Le Beaufort, laughing aloud with the delight of his fierce pastime, was overthrowing all before him, but hearing shouts of warning from the populace, whose favourite his successes had instantly rendered him, he wheeled round to meet whatever foe might be following. It happened that the Orsino was immediately after him, who had already displayed an enthusiasm which had in it something of the desperation and ferocious violence of a real battle, and had overthrown many who imagined themselves more than a match for him. Whether he was blinded by the passions which urged him on, or in reality sought the perilous glory of overthrowing the English knight, our chronicler but conjectures, certain only that the Orsino drove full tilt at the breast of Le Beaufort—who then exhibited the noblest quality of his chivalric character, for sinking his own lance, he suffered the whole shock of his opponent’s weapon, which bent him back in the crupper, but shivered in the deed, and springing up again in the saddle with a sprightly—“Ha, Paolo, thou hast my breath on thy lance?” he passed on, and dashed Oliverotto from his saddle as if he had been a figure of stuffed straw, with what little or none remained in his lungs! The generosity and heroic valour of the whole deed struck the noble chords which are in every human breast, though sometimes rusted and discordant—and there arose such a tempest of applause—such deafening Vivas—Hurrahs—Vive-vives! Vivats! that when some gladiador did bravely in the ancient times under the gaze of eighty thousand spectators, never was there a louder tumult. But the most precious tribute of all was Lucrezia’s involuntary repetition of the young knight’s motto—*O mon Le Beaufort!*—which all around her distinctly heard.

But among his fellow-combatants this universal applause kindled as general a desire to carry away the glory of the overthrow of so distinguished a knight; in especial the French cavaliers, of whom there were

many present, learning that he was English, essayed all that the brilliant skill and courage of their nation could do against him. But the thews and sinews of the English youth, and his unconquerable resolve still bore him off victorious from every encounter, until humanity itself seemed incapable of farther exertion, without some pause. The kings-at-arms, while recording his achievements with astonishment, entreated him to reserve some strength for the subsequent contests; even Lucrezia sent in vain the requests of herself and the ladies to give himself some rest, since in him they placed their chief hopes; until he had shivered the last of his three spears, he would not leave the field, and then rode, covered with dust and warlike sweat, but with a gay and prancing movement of his equally English steed, to thank the ladies for their concern in his behalf.

“If your king called you *The Beaufort*—henceforth we are determined to call you *The Knight*! you have no match in Italy—none in the world!” said Lucrezia, with a female enthusiasm for valour, perhaps quickened by the fierce glance of the Hospitaller. “Would the hour were come to relieve you of that steel, for you must needs be hurt by the Orsino’s ungentle blow!—and, if you will accept such awkward squires, myself and damsels will rejoice in the task. Meanwhile, I pray you, wipe the dust from your visage with this kerchief!”

And she handed her own—one of precious woof, curiously embroidered, and certainly gifted with effects as poisonous as that of the Moor of Venice. But using it only to press to his lips, the young knight tied it round his arm, exclaiming, “Now I cannot fail!”

Meanwhile the conflict in the lists continued, though with less interest in the spectators, until the achievements of the Orsino began to attract general attention. Feeling that his triumph against Le Beaufort had brought on him general disapprobation, himself ashamed of it, and anxious to efface the recollection, his former motives were so reinforced that he gained a strength like that of madness; and his fury materially aided in the rapid winnowing which now took place among the combatants, a considerable part of whom, stunned by severe falls, or with dislocated limbs, were continually retiring from the conflict. Finally, the last lance of this first struggle which remained unbroken of those who had the power to use the prescribed number, was found in the Orsino’s hand.

The moment the first onset finished, the heralds hurried to compare notes before Cæsar; the pursuivants to clear the arena of all the shattered pieces of armour, the scarfs, the plumes, the jewels, which all became their perquisites. A chronicler relates that of broken lances alone there might have been kindled a bonfire to roast a dozen oxen! The squires hastened to undo the armour of their lords during the breathing space, to hand them wine and other refreshments, and solace them with tidings of what they had observed of their valour; while the sergeants-at-arms busily examined the bundles of fresh lances which were brought in, to be certain that they were all of the prescribed form and thickness. The Orsino hastened to join Le Beaufort beneath the baleony of the ladies. He was received at first with evident coldness by all the fair bevy, until he said, handing his lance to Sir Reginald, “Here is one which your pupil was determined to win for you, to beg the pardon of another that did wrong—but in heedlessness.”

“It was a shrewd stroke—but I am only woman within my breast, for there only the blow pained me, coming from thee—for had we not promised to forbear each other?” said the young knight, jocundly. “But I knew

thou didst it not of purpose, but in the pell-mell, where a man might drive at his father's grey beard. Yet, in faith, if this lance win me the prize, it shall not be against its giver."

Paolo was touched, and Lucrezia, pleased with his evident feeling, praised his achievements so warmly that his desire to renew them was heightened to its former feverish violence.

Fruit and wines were now distributed to all the pontifical guests and the knights; but it was observed that the Hospitaller refused either with a shudder. And yet he had long felt his strength ebbing away, and it was with difficulty he kept upright in his saddle.

The preparations continued for the second onset, which was likely to prove a far more obstinate one than the first, as only the bravest and most skilful knights remained to contest it, more than half the number being weeded out. Caesar had been for a long time engaged in consultation with kings-at-arms and heralds; but at length it was declared that Sir Reginald had won the first praise of valour, and the Orsino the second. This was of no advantage to either, except to soften the possible ultimate defeat; for all who had accomplished the feat of overthrowing one opponent, were entitled to continue the struggle for the prize. On hearing the declaration, and the numbers for the renewed contest, the Hospitaller roused himself with a strong effort of mind over matter, and demanded a place in it. "But inasmuch as I should not enter it, being fresh, let me first break a lance with the two victors of the onset—Sir Reginald first," he exclaimed, endeavouring to speak with calmness.

"Nay—for I am grieved, good knight, but the numbers are again equal," said Caesar. "You must yet abide your time; since none of these can breathe during a second course without forfeiting all the honour he won in the first."

"Yet I will yield my place, to give my brother-in-arms room to display his noble chivalry; I shall be well recompensed by remaining here," said the generous knight of England.

"Why so, then, it shall be. The Lord Orsino longs to essay your Lombard chivalry," said Caesar, and, with inexpressible disappointment and vexation, but finding that he could not possibly retreat, Alfonso was compelled to accept the proffer. The look of enthusiastic approbation which Lucrezia cast on Sir Reginald, seemed, however, to revive all the exhausted powers of his frame. Emulation and a burning thirst for revenge chased off the insidious languor with which the potion he had swallowed yet lingered in his veins; and when the trumpets again blew to the charge, few rushed into the conflict with a more furious determination to triumph in it, or perhaps with more likelihood, if the wild excitement did not pass away.

The second battle might almost be considered a repetition of the first, save that it was contended during a much longer time, with more skill, and with less of the mad impetuosity of the outbreak. From different causes, the same thing animated both Alfonso and the Orsino to almost superhuman exertions—Lucrezia now fairly hung over her balcony, eyes, ears, and soul rapt in the spectacle below,—Alfonso imagined, to rejoice in his overthrow procured by her inhuman arts, while the Orsino was stimulated by the desire to prove that he could maintain her cause as valiantly as Sir Reginald, and by his hatred of the supposed envoy undefinedly mingled with jealousy. But with all this mutual ill-will, accident prevented them from coming to an encounter, until the continual

triumphs of Alfonso stimulated the Orsino's exasperation, and the thinning of the ranks permitted him to indulge it. "Ho, Knight of St. John!" he shouted. "Now is the time of which I spoke to you erewhile!—Let us cross spears! Lucrezia and Love!"

"Our Lady and Chastity!" replied Alfonso, and they rushed at one another, lance in rest, the knights in general pausing to give their fury way. The next instant the Orsino lay upon the sands of the lists, and his courser was galloping wildly and unmastered round them—the saddle for the first time on that day emptied.

Le Beaufort hastened with the Orsino's squires to raise him, but ere they arrived Paolo was on his feet, staggering about to regain his horse, and dizzy like a drunken man. But there was something in Alfonso's demeanour which excited general indignation; he laughed loudly and scornfully, and glanced up at Lucrezia with a frenzied exultation which she felt in her soul's core, and which stirred Le Beaufort's hot blood at once with pity and anger. Regardless of any sign of opinion, Alfonso continued to rage like some hero of fabulous romance, until no one dared to meet his shock, and he overthrew almost without resistance, remaining undoubted triumpher in the second contest, but without extorting any mark of popular admiration or sympathy.

The Orsino sat, much exhausted, in a chair beneath the balcony of the ladies, comforted somewhat by Lucrezia's condolence, and the attentions of his friend, but still burning with secret indignation. The moment the course was finished, he sprang up, and commanded his squires to relock his armour for a new assault. At this moment, Lucrezia's eye wandered to the Hospitaller, who had raised his vizor to breathe, and was leaning motionless on his lance in the centre of the arena. "Nay, my lord, you have rested; our cause needs no advantages, and the Knight of St. John is spent!" she exclaimed. "Duke Cæsar, this must not be.—We will not win unfairly."

The duke glanced expressively at the Orsino, as he replied, "Our sister fulfils a Christian precept;—but we deem 'tis justly urged. The third onset shall be fought without any of the three triumphers, and there will remain, 'tis like, the very flower and essence of the luckier chivalry to contend against them!"

The decrees of the Judge of the Field were always absolute, and one of the three champions indeed was evidently too much exhausted. The spectators beheld that when Alfonso's squires put his horse in motion to lead him out of the lists, he sank forward on its neck, and with difficulty straightened himself again in the saddle. It seemed that even Lucrezia was moved at the sight, or desired to complete her work; for a page of her suite arrived with a goblet of wine, which he was commanded in her name to request him to accept. The Hospitaller instantly seized the goblet, and poured the whole rich beverage on the sand, returning it empty to the page. "Our Lady of Purity supports me! I need none other," was his reply to the astonished attendant, and to the still more amazed and disconcerted gazer.

And now began the third onset, which, to the surprise of many, was as furious and more lasting than either of the preceding; for not only was the grain thrice bolted, but those who remained in the contest were rekindled and desperate with the narrowing of the circle of hope. Heralds in general allowed that brighter feats of chivalry had not been exhibited within their recollection; and one ancient king-at-arms, nearly a century

old, declared, in the exultation of his heart, that knighthood had reached its highest splendour, and could but henceforth decay.

These three conflicts had wasted nearly the whole of the day, and Le Beaufort, in his impatience, kept up an uneasy glancing at the sun, which began to decline; but, at length, the third triple of lances was exhausted, and of the five hundred which began the battles, only forty remained to contest the prize with Alfonso, the Orsino, and Sir Reginald; but as the triumpher in this round had not given so many strokes as Paolo in the contest in which he was only second to Le Beaufort, he was declared to be champion of it. Paolo now hastened to Cæsar's chair, and earnestly requested that the last contest might be with swords.

"Nay, for ye are all too angry-coloured, and mayhap will turn the edges," replied Cæsar. "And for the same cause, we ordain that unless there be no other opponents, none of you three shall tilt at the other, or shall forfeit the prize."

The discontent of the Orsino was very visible, and he muttered in a low tone, "Signor, you too favour the envoy!—he hath already thrown me at the lance: my horse wavers at his black panoply."

"Tut, man, I have observed him this half hour; his colours come and go like a Sallee rover's—he shall be the more spent to your hand," returned the duke, in the same voice. "I care not, for my part, if your lance had a point to gore a buffalo mad, and were in his back!"

After a sufficient rest allowed to the late combatants, once more the lines were marshalled; and the excitement, which had been long languishing, was renewed with more than its first energy, but in a different manner. Attention was concentrated and silent; all hung eagerly forward, even those on the most slippery elevations, but no one uttered a sound; the very women ceased to buzz their hopes and fears. The kings-at-arms who guarded the prize raised it more loftily on their gilded staves, the diamonds sparkling ruby tints in the westerling sun; the trumpets that timed the marshalry fluttered with the agitation of their blowers. It was remarked that when the Hospitaller was summoned, he did not seem to bear until his squires had twice admonished him; and then he came into the lists with a slow and trailing movement. Even when the onset began he appeared like one awaking slowly from a lethargy; and suddenly the rude shock of a French spear, which carried off his helmet, tearing all its lacings asunder, revealed him glaring around as if awakened on the start, deadly pale, and paler by contrast with his raven hair. A faint female cry was heard, which became general and mingled with those of men, and especially of the marshals, when, without accepting the helmet which his squire instantly raised, the Hospitaller dashed on like a madman, and overthrew the Frenchman, and two more knights in his way. Excited then by a furious emulation, Sir Reginald and the Orsino even surpassed their former achievements. But the resistance was desperate and prolonged; instead of the shivered armour and spears, the sands became reddened all over with large drops of blood. Several fell from exhaustion, after defying every effort of their enemies to overthrew them. Cæsar himself seemed fearful of the results; and once or twice, as the conflict waxed very close and furious, he raised his baton as if intending to interpose; and as the Hospitaller had not resumed his helmet, insensible to all the cries of his squire, but continued to rage on, there seemed a justifiable pretext. But something in the horror-struck tone in which Lucrezia called upon him to interfere, so diverted him that he could not for laugh-

ing—when suddenly all necessity ceased. Six knights only remained excepting the three who were forbidden to attack each other—and these six, on the verge of exhaustion and blind with rage and emulation, rushed at each other with such transcendent fury that all were overthrown, horses and all, as if with the scattered destruction of a thunderbolt.

After a moment's pause of general astonishment, there arose a deafening uproar, which subsided into a sudden and appalling silence when the spectators beheld what instantly followed.

The pallid visage of the Hospitaller flushed some unearthly colour, his eyes flamed madly, his whole frame shook with the convulsions of a passion which seemed too violent for the frame of humanity to endure; and whirling his horse round as if to take room for a charge, he yelled till the amphitheatre rung in every crevice, “Have at you now, English boy!”

“Nay, Lombard! unless my brother the Orsino's arm fails—I contend no longer for the prize!—It is sufficient that Love triumphs over your rudeness!” replied Sir Reginald, with strong and ill-suppressed emotion, partly at the strange bitterness of his once brother-in-arms, but chiefly with regret at the enormous sacrifice which his generous friendship made,—perhaps unknown to himself, with an intention of refuting Paolo's rising suspicions.

“With none but thee!” shouted the Hospitaller, wheeling his horse, poising his lance, and taking his career. “I have but strength for thee! I have overthrown the Orsino—the repetition were easy—but thou!—I say, thou!—Knight of England! if thou art not a coward, a dastard!—before thy mistress I say it!—a slave to be spat upon in the market-place—if ——”

But ere he had reached thus far Le Beaufort had dashed his spurs to the rowels in his steed, and rushed forward like a mountain-torrent suddenly bursting through some dam—without observing that the Orsino, half maddened with his share of the insult, was also in full career;—neither did the Hospitaller, absorbed in the frenzy of his feeling against Le Beaufort. In vain arose on every side one universal shout and shriek; in vain did the truncheon of the judge fall; in vain did marshals and heralds rush in! The decisive moment was passed, and the Hospitaller encountering at the same instant the shock of two lances urged with all the violence which the madness of passion could give, was hurled to a considerable distance from his horse, and lay stretched on his back on the lists, his head bleeding from behind so as to redden all the black hair, his breast-plate torn away and blood soaking through the silk doublet within, perfectly motionless, and apparently dead!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“Sith there is yet a credence in my heart,
An esperance so obstinately strong,
As doth invert the attest of eyes and ears,
As if those organs had deceptions functions,
Created only to calumniate.”—SHAKSPERE.

During several days after the tournament the Knight of St. John enjoyed but a degree of twilight consciousness. Something he afterwards remembered of a rushing crowd, of being borne along gently but rapidly, as if by the wind, and of the cold air of a river blowing strongly on his face. Then

all was lost until opening his eyes, stretched as though on a bank of soft grass, numerous faces swam around him, and he had a distinct recollection of a hooded nun washing his wounded breast with some balmy fluid, while divers sages, in black mantles and furred caps, spoke in low and mysterious mutterings around. He remembered little more until, awaking with a start from a deep sleep, he found himself extended on a magnificent couch, covered with white velvet brocade, and propped, on cushions of white satin. The walls were hung with arras, wrought with representations of the loves of the gods, which future times have considered somewhat exceeding even the license of those in which they were devised. The ceiling was painted with a Hymen and Cupids showering flowers on the couch below; and from this circumstance, and the predominance of white and silver in the ornaments, it seemed like a bridal chamber but just made ready for the reception of some royal pair. Among all the objects around him Alfonso recognised only one—Messer Pietro Bembo—who was busied in penning some inspiration, which he huddled up the moment he perceived his lord looking at him with an understanding and remembering eye, but which was undoubtedly headed “*Ad Lucretiam.*”

Alfonso’s recollections rapidly returned, and he began to make inquiries which for some time Bembo endeavoured to avoid answering, until he found that the prince was more irritated by his silence than he could be by his communicativeness. Alfonso then learned with amazement and chagrin that he was in an apartement of the Vatican, whether he had been conveyed by the pontiff’s orders; and where he had been sedulously attended by his holiness’s own chirurgeons, an ancient lady, nurse to Donna Lucrezia, and a nun of the Agonizants, whose charitable dedication it was to attend the sick and console the dying. All had been unremitting in attentions; the pope sent messengers hourly to inquire into his state; the canon had it in command to wait upon Donna Lucrezia three times in the day to report it; the Penitentiary had presented himself several times to administer spiritual assistance. Alfonso began to suspect that the canon had betrayed his rank; but he declared to the contrary with such solemnity, averring that as his abhorrence of the lady had so vehemently increased, he knew that to divulge it would bring him into a position of great danger—that the prince could not refuse him credence.

“And the false and dishonoured knights who hurled me from my horse with a conjoint treachery! which of them has won the prize,—wherein, by my father’s life, he shall not long exult!” said the Hospitaller, with a violence which announced either the return of strength to his exhausted frame, or renewed fever.

“Nay, my lord, Le Beaufort wept when he saw what had happed, and all men agreed that it was an accident; and as oft as he meets me in the palace, though he is yet mad with the words you gave him, and the Orsino, to my thought, rejoices in your evil chance—he asks how fares it with you as tenderly as an it were for his brother,” replied Bembo. “As to the prize, no man hath it; the Duke of Romagna has impounded it for farther advice.”

“In the palace? A frequent guest, I doubt not, of Lucrezia. Methought I heard her laugh the loudest when I fell!”

“I have not heard her grace laugh loudly at all,” replied Bembo. “But certain I am, she laughed neither loudly nor lowly on occasion of your lordship’s mishap, for she immediately swooned away, and, as I happened to be at hand, in my arms, so that I could not mistake.”

"She feared for her minion!" bitterly replied Alfonso.

"Who that may be, I guess not, but certes your grace was the only one to be feared for at the instant. Why, she even delayed the tournameint feast until the mediciners pronounced you in no danger, for at the time the strange symptom of your deep sleeps had not struck them, which were not, the little Greek declares, lethargies of concussion, but some wonderful and admirable provision of nature to restore the exhaustion of the spirits, which is the worst part of your injuries."

Alfonso smiled derisively and bitterly at this medical acumen, remembering the fatal potion, the effects of which he had struggled against on the whole of that eventful day, but which had finally contributed in no small degree to his defeat.

"I shall revive, then, it seems, from that, and soon," he replied. "And after I have righted myself on the English minion, I have nothing more to do in Rome; and, canon, we will depart satisfied that our bruises are no worse."

"Let us depart at once, if at all, my lord; for indeed you have no wrong to avenge on the young knight," said Bembo pathetically.

"But art thou assured of that? Yea, I am convinced that by this time —nay, indeed they must laugh together when they think of it," ejaculated Alfonso.

"I shall be infinitely blamed by the mediciners for stirring you thus; and a melon against a millet-seed, here they come!" exclaimed the canon, hearing a footstep; but if any one had taken his wager he would have lost the melon, for the opening door admitted Fra Bruno.

Although of its wonted studious pallor, the visage of the friar betraye none of the emotion which, remembering the manner of their parting, the sight of Alfonso would seem naturally to rekindle. Excepting that his eye shunned Alfonso's, his demeanour was inexpressibly gentle and compassionate. He seated himself beside the couch, and observing that he had some skill in the mediciner's art, he felt the patient's pulse.

"It is still perturbed, but life returns in its full tide," he said, thoughtfully. "Yet, if I have any skill, your lesion is as much of mind as body; and perchance I might bestow some soothing emollients to the wounds within," and he glanced significantly at Bembo.

"Nay, reverendissimè, I cannot leave my friend for an instant, for so I faithfully promised the gentle nun," said the canon.

"The nun!—have you a nun among your attendants, signor?" said Fra Bruno, with a melancholy smile.

"And I am pledged not to suffer any medicaments to be applied to the wounds but those which she spreads, under sanction of the physicians," continued Bembo, resolutely, and with a suspicion in his manner which struck the Hospitaller.

"Indeed!—then even in your presence, master canon, I must bid you beware, Knight of Ferrara!" exclaimed the Dominican, with a glance full of trouble and anguish. "I know that some frenzy has deceived you into mistrust of mine intents—the malice of my enemies gives to all my acts, even of Christian charity, of gratitude, of ghostly concern in a penitent's relapses—hideous misinterpretations! But although my predictions and warnings seem contradicted by the event, although you are here as an honoured and cherished guest, in this chamber which beheld the Prince of Salerno, within one little moon, a bridegroom delirious with happiness—a corpse covered with bleeding wounds! I tell you, suffer no

woman to medicine your hurts—whose unskilful or too skilled hands—gangrene I have known oft to follow on a raw wound tented thus!"

"Fra Bruno, since we last met, I have had much cause to think your warnings as faithful as the raven's, however prompted," replied Alfonso, starting convulsively up from his soft pillows. "Yea, death was tendered to me in as fair a guise as it may now be amid this magnificence? Poison was administered to me in fruit and wine, slow, lethargic poison, intending both my dishonour and destruction."

"Your reverend lordship will be much and fitly blamed for this influx of delirium," said Bembo, reproachfully.

"Why, so I will believe it—so I will hope! Signor, it could not be, or was meant only to hinder you from appearing against her at the tournament," said the friar, hurriedly. "But, indeed—I have heard something of this. I beseech you depart with all speed from Rome, for the Borgias—but if this chamber be dumb to you, the eloquence of an angel were in vain!"

"Doth the ointment pain you, my lord, which is now on your torn breast?" said Bembo, fairly aghast.

"No, to the contrary—it soothes as if Love had gathered the simples for Esculapius," replied the prince.

"And your hurts are fast healing—the bruises paleing—your senses clear and perfectly restored," continued the bewildered canon. "I know not what ye speak of drugs and poisons, but on my faith, and as I live, I do believe that this nun who washes them as much in her tears as in the mediciner's lotions, is Donna Lucrezia herself, for I detected her by her matchless hand, and a rare emerald on it, forgotten in hurry and agitation."

"Can this be possible?" exclaimed Alfonso, staring at the Dominican.

"It was even thus with the Prince of Salerno—him too I warned—but he tarried on," said Fra Bruno calmly, and rising to depart. "But let this oracle remain with thee, son—if the light and varying fancy of a woman wavers now to preserve thee, thou art only the more assured of destruction from a sterner nature which nothing human ever yet restrained!"

"Let us leave this fatal palace—Rome itself—on the instant, signor!" ejaculated Bembo; and while he spoke, footsteps were audible, scarcely heeded in his agitation until the door opened, and four dignitaries of the healing art, one of whom was a Greek and a dwarf, accompanied by two females, made their appearance. The sages wore the robes and hoods peculiar to their office, for two centuries were yet given to them ere, in evil hour, the disciples of Galen resigned half their sway over human credulity with their imposing costume. One of the females was a closely veiled nun of the Agonizants; the other a grave, matronly dame, in black satin robe and hood, nearly covered with pricked lace, and with a most respectable and demure air, in whom, nevertheless, Alfonso recognized Mona Faustina.

Fra Bruno paused, eyeing the nun with a piercing glance, to which she only replied by a reverential bend, approaching the patient's couch. The little Greek, who was one of the best physicians of Rome, and was known by the name of "Il Gobbo," immediately directed the women to remove the bandages, an office which the sages seemed to consider below their dignity. But when the nun made a modest gesture, as if to withdraw the coverlet from the knight's breast, he repulsed her with some violence, clutching her arm and gripping rather than holding it, as he said, "No,

good sister, no! for since an attempt was made to poison me by a woman, I have ever dreaded the softness of female touch; you shall not dress my wounds."

"To poison you, signor!" said the nun, faintly, but in an exceedingly alarmed voice.

"Or I were not now here—for it was the drugs they gave me in my meat, and not the lance of the Orsino's accomplice, that laid me in the dust, for Borgias to laugh at!" continued the knight. "Go to, go to; you shall not touch me—unless indeed you unveil, that I may behold you are not some form of the treachery that pursues me."

"An attempt was indeed made—or by accident some evil drug was administered to my friend, on the morning of the tournament," said Bembo, intercedingly.

"Il Gobbo, the knight still raves!" said the nun, in a disordered voice. "Our presence seems but to heighten his delirium—Mona Faustina, let us hence."

Perceiving that the nun's step wavered as she retired from the couch, Fra Bruno advanced to her support; but resuming her strength with an effort, she repeated her reverence, and glided rapidly out of the chamber, followed, nevertheless, by the Penitentiary.

The physicians, not much surprised at a feverish caprice, dressed the hurt themselves, which was principally a broad laceration of the skin by Le Beaufort's lance, and withdrew, commanding that the patient should be kept very quiet. But Bembo's anxiety had become too great to comply with the injunction, and, at his entreaty, Alfonso revealed the adventure of the fruit and wine, and the reasons which he had to believe that Lucrezia herself had devised the mischief.

"And can it really be that angels to look at, can be devils indeed?" said the canon, bewilderedly. "I will tear my sonnet;—and now I remember it was a strange word dropped by Master Burciardo, when he showed me over these gorgeous bridal chambers, moralizing something tediously on the vanity of earthly pomp, for he said 'Who would have thought that within a month after so joyful a wedding, the royal groom himself should die on that very couch, like a deer strangled by the dogs when the hunters' arrows had failed in many wounds to make one mortal?'"

"Said he so?" returned Alfonso, remembering, at the same instant, with singular effect, the ballerina's declaration that at least Lucrezia feared not the revelations which these direful chambers might give forth.

"By whose order was I brought to so ill-omened a lodging?"

"By express command of the Lady Lucrezia, and I thought it was to us the more honour," said Bembo, timorously peering around. "But who knows? it may be perchance the chamber hath facilities we wot not of, for purposes of mischief; and now I can believe what you went so perilously nigh with your Jewess to prove, signor, that Lucrezia could give us a true report of Duke Gandia's end."

This conviction in another, which he had laboured so assiduously to procure for himself, was in a high degree distasteful to the Hospitaller; and he now indirectly strove to shake it by relating the whole process of his Hebrew discoveries. The canon grew every instant more and more puzzled, and suspended the destruction of his sonnet.

"All that I can clearly conclude is that the same hand hath been ever at work; but whether A's, or C's, or L's, are mysteries impenetrable," he said at length, with a fearful glance round the chamber. "Would to

heaven, though the mere thought makes me shudder, that there be some ghost appertaining to this magnificence who would blab the truth!"

"Burciardo's saying gives me hopes of a less fearful intelligencer," replied Alfonso. "The chirurgeons counsel me to eat—what if, when he comes, as thou sayest he often does from the pontiff, we got him into a talking humour over some viands?"

"To eat with him were indeed a good precaution," said Bembo, timidly. "But it might be dangerous to know too much."

"I would incur every risk to know but so much as might satisfy these devouring doubts in my soul!" replied Alfonso.

Some hours, however, elapsed ere the occasion arrived in the person of the worthy Dean of Strasburgh, who was later than his wont, for night was gathering in. Alfonso had long been silent, exhausted with the conversation and his emotion, while the canon tormented himself in silence with a flood of new and vague apprehensions. His reverie was at last disturbed by a gentle rap at the door; but as Alfonso seemed not to hear it, Bembo persuaded himself that he had not either; and with this conviction his teeth began to chatter in his head.

There was another tap at the door.

"Signor, hear you not that—that rapping?" said Bembo, desperately.

"Murder does not announce his approach; admit it, whatever it may be," said Alfonso.

"Admit it, signor!" said the canon, by no means delighted with the pronoun.

"Enter!" said the Hospitaller, in a loud voice, glancing at his sword, which was at the foot of the couch, and then looking steadfastly at the door. It opened immediately, and no ghost appeared, but to the contrary, the substantial person of the master of the ceremonies, attended by two pages with lamps. The radiance, and the heavy honest visage of the German ecclesiastic restored the canon's heart to its usual place under the fifth rib.

"And how fares it with your lordship?" he said, with an air of importance, but with evident kindness. "I come not now from his holiness, but from the Lady Lucrezia, who bade me say that she would not commence the saraband until she learned your condition."

"Nothing ails me but a little weariness, and a scratch or two scarce worth the leeching," replied the knight, carelessly. "I pray you return my humblest thanks, the more due because the less deserved; and then, if you have a few minutes to waste, it were charity, worthy master dean, to bestow them in cheering us with your conversation, the wit and pleasantry of which Messer Pietro lauds to the skies."

"And, truly, he is allowed to be the completest judge in Italy in such wares," replied the gratified dean. "But I need not hurry; it as a mere court sugar-plum. I'll warrant, if I had turned as I went out, I should have seen her already in the saraband with Sir Reginald. He is the ladies' peacock now—none but he." And selecting a chair, he seated himself with a pompous sight, as if quite exhausted with the fatigues of the day.

"Messer Bembo, have we no wine to commend to Master John's favour, spent as he is with the toils of his illustrious office?" said Alfonso.

"No, no; not for the world; you must not be allowed to taste a drop of wine for the whole world!" replied the German ecclesiastic, adroitly shifting the first too positive negation.

"Nay, 'tis permitted now," said the wounded knight, jocosely. "And

Bembo knows what talisman to touch to bring us aught we require in these enchanted precincts."

Wine was accordingly produced, and although Bembo's taste was decidedly opposed to the tart wines of Germany, he imitated the dean in drinking only Rhenish.

"Heartily pledging your speedy wholeness, reverend knight," said Burchard, with a quaff which seemed to threaten his own. "It is as cool as if from the cellars of my abbey, which are under the Rhine. My laborious office indeed sometimes makes refreshment desirable, for heaven knows it were easier to keep a herd of fleas on the Campagna, than this court in order. Nevertheless, brothers, I shall deem myself happy if you will command me on anything to your service, which has been particularly enjoined on me. Druik, brother canon,—but methought you preferred the Greco? Fear it not, it is very ripe."

"Thanks to your care, father,—if I may call one so who is apparently not very much older than myself,—I lack nothing," replied the Hospitaller. "To the contrary, I am too well treated; for methinks I must needs have turned some worthier person out of these chambers, which seem rather prepared for a joyful bridegroom than a wounded combatant?"

"You are right and you are wrong, signor; but you have turned no one out of his enjoyments,—at least, I hope not, for these apartments have not been inhabited by any one since the death of the Prince of Salerno, Duke of Biselli, whose soul all blessed saints assoil!" said Master John.

"The husband of his holiness's daughter?" returned the knight, carelessly.

"His holiness's niece, brother," said Burchard, reprovingly, but not unmindful of Alfonso's generous equalization of their ages.

"Ay, truly, his niece; but he loves her as if she were his own daughter? ay, and more!" replied the knight, with a penetrating glance which was altogether lost on Master John's stolid visage.

"Ay, indeed, for he uses her counsels even in the government of the church; and in his holiness's absences she has more than once had the whole patrimony under her orders," said the worthy dean with a sigh. "Not that there are many cardinals who have a better judgment in state matters than Domina Lucretia. I have seen her knitting gold lace, and all the time give as wise orders for the management of the city as if she were reading out of Proverbs; but the scandal of it, signor, the scandal! It is well that our poor Germans listen to nothing that comes from Rome but the Apostolic bulls, or they would be taking crotchets again like those of the poisonous Englishman, Johannes Wyclif."

Once in the vein of complaint, it was not difficult to keep Burchard in it. It was strange how the German—all ecclesiastic as he was—managed to unite the most implicit veneration for the pontiff with a general disapprobation for his actions, or rather manners. Burchard was naturally garrulous and communicative; the wine began to assist his conversational powers; and finding that he was listened to with great interest, he related numerous anecdotes of the court which made even Bembo stare, and contemplate with a species of envy the man who dared to relate them with such freedom. But what principally struck Alfonso was the dean's numerous allusions to secret counsels and interviews which took place between Lucrezia and the pontiff; to which he seemed to attach some portentous significance. Alfonso silently interpreted these suggestions in

harmony with his own black theories, although he clearly perceived from the drift of the dean's discourse, his dislike of the new courtiers, as he called the men raised by Cæsar's influence, his hints of the reasons which induced Alexander to wed his daughter to the chief of the rebellious barons, that he alluded to some disunion among the Borgias themselves.

"And was it merely to make way for this alliance that the Prince of Salerno was murdered, deem you, brother?" said Alfonso, striving to conceal the anxiety which he feared his eyes betrayed.

"The Prince of Salerno, Dux Bisilarum, was murdered on the steps of St. Peter, immediately before the great jubilee entrance, by divers unknown persons," he replied, staggered by the very boldness of the question. "But perhaps it were not unseasonable to mention, although I received some hints to the contrary, that the chambers to the left of this tower are inhabited by Domina Lucretia, and her vigilant female court, who have more sensitive ears than any hare in stubble."

"In verity," said Alfonso; and he paused musingly ere he continued. "But certain it is that the Prince of Salerno was murdered; and so learned a clerk cannot be ignorant of the Ciceronian question concerning a crime whose perpetrators are unknown: *Cui bono?* to whose advantage was it?"

"Alas, my learning is not so vast as you imagine, and other people conjecture, seeing that I write in Latin with as much ease as in my mother tongue," replied the modest Dean of Strasburgh, "which, by the by, I have almost forgotten, for Domina Lucretia told me the other day that I had transferred my German accent altogether into the Italian; and it cannot be denied she has a sweet smile when she pleases! But your *Cui bono*, signor, would lay the blame at Orsini doors, who were at that time far enough from dreaming to become his holiness's sons-in-law, being in arms against him."

"Nephews-in-law, good brother!" said Alfonso, jocosely adopting the late reprobating tone of the dean. "But we heard in Lombardy that the prince perished not of the wounds he received—but was strangled in his own chamber of the Vatican!"

"You did—in Lombardy?" said the dean, vacantly. "'Tis true, he died very suddenly—for I myself—I had not left him many minutes—on that very couch whereon you now lie—recovering fast he was, too, when I may say, I just looked round, and it was over!"

"Then it is utterly false that the young man was 'strangled *like a deer by the dogs when the hunter's arrows have failed?*'" said Alfonso, repeating Bembo's report of the dean's own words.

"Of course—utterly!" said Burchard, with a look which confessed the reverse, and a dim consciousness that he heard himself quoted.

"How fell it then, since you were present, and his wounds were healing fast?" said Alfonso; and Bembo hung forward in an agony of attention.

"Hi, hi,—I suppose you have your fears like the ignorant vulgar—*ignarus pecus, eh?*" said Burchard, with an unconscious chuckle. "And to be sure there are stories which, I suppose, frightened my Lady Lucrezia from lodging here; for she is altogether a woman—the most complete woman I ever saw, in her ways! Not that I ever saw anything myself—but to be sure, I have never been in these rooms after nightfall, until now."

"Tell me then how it chanced—for you must own it is no pleasant thought to accompany slumbers in this magnificent desolation," said Alfonso.

"Certes, no; and I may certainly relate what I witnessed," said Burchard, musing by what means he might, without compromising himself, indulge in his beloved gossip. "You must know, signor," he continued, leaning with his elbow on the knight's pillows, and speaking in a low and confidential tone, "You must know that the young prince had five chief wounds, two on the head and shoulder, strokes of an axe; a knife run into his left side that missed the heart; a sword-cut in the hand, and a deep laceration of a halberd in the thigh: one would have thought he might have died of all that?"

"But he lived a month after?" interrupted the knight.

"A month?—let me see," observed the dean, with an air of deliberate calculation, which he assisted by many sips at his goblet. "He received these wounds (besides a score of less important things) at one hour after sunset, on the fifteenth day of the month of June; and on the eighteenth day of the following July he was strangled."

"Strangled, say you?" interrupted Alfonso, catching at the word which the dean, in the ardour of calculation, inadvertently dropped.

"What am I raving?" he exclaimed, starting and colouring to the deep rich tint of beet-rot in a sallad. "Surely I was thinking of something else in my diary, for I enter all these little things for future precedents. But to our discourse, signor. On that day, I mean rather night, (it was about this hour,) it pleased heaven most unexpectedly to release his highness from the flesh. Yes, he was recovering—recovering fast—for I came on that very occasion from his holiness to know how the duke fared, and found him propped up, just as you are now, brother, chirping little bits of Neapolitan love ditties, and—well may they talk of the light before death!—laughing at Fra Bruno's shaven crown, who had been sent to him with some kind words from the Lady Lucrezia, (though I know it was chiefly by his holiness's command,) and—what did he compare it to? Was it a turkey's egg? for, said he, 'tis no goose's, thine, friar Bruno! He was a rough lad indeed to be a prince—as rough as a young bear!—how he would anger my Lady Lucrezia with his mad ways before everybody—her fath—uncle too! And while we were talking with him, and comforting him, comes in a gentleman with some private message from his holiness, relating to the prince's demand that his wife should come and see him, which she had not dared after his furious accusation of her, as if that she—but that is nothing to the point. Thereupon we retired, as became us, the message being private—Fra Bruno and I—and, in very truth, I can but recollect with what a look he followed us, as an he would have bid us rest, but dared not! So there remained only Don Miguel and the Greek physician we call 'Il Gobbo.'"

"Don Miguel? interrupted Alfonso. "What, the Captain of Santangelo?"

"Yea, therein superseding the Bishop of Giorgento, a very capable man, but no soldier," said Burchard, somewhat grumbly. "Well, we went out—was I not there? We went out at yonder door, which opens into a fair saloon, much garnished with Venice mirror: and, not to seem listening, walked to the opposite end. Suddenly Fra Bruno plucked my sleeve, and asked me if I did not hear some noise, as of one that called for help; whereupon I, being I confess somewhat anxious to know for what cause his holiness had sent a gentleman not of his attendance—a new courtier, a servant of the Duke's—went lightly back on tiptoe to learn what his highness wanted. But already, poor youth, he was at the last

agony—Don Miguel and the physician both hanging over him, trying to undo the tight things about his neck, and so frightened they could not call for help. For my part, I dared not pretend to have seen ; Fra Bruno had vanished, I know not whither ; and when at last they regained voice, and I heard them cry, the poor prince was so dead that all I could do was to say a miserere for his cruelly parted soul ! ”

“ Don Miguel—Cæsar’s chosen instrument—*he* did it ? ” exclaimed Alfonso, with such an eagerness and plainness of innuendo that Burchard gave a terrified start.

“ Nay, truly he did afterwards deny to my face that he had alleged any mission from his holiness, and Il Cobbo confirmed the same,” replied the dean, suddenly rising. “ And indeed, whoever speaks of Don Migueloto, cannot deny that he is a most honourable gentleman ! But now that I have set your mind on down regarding the natural death of your predecessor, I must take my leave, for Domina Lucretia will begin to remember that she sent me on an errand, and I have discoursed enough to give our noble patient a good night’s rest.”

Alfonso protested, and with great truth, that he had not discovered any soporific virtues in the dean’s discourse ; and with mutual compliments, they separated, Bembo ceremoniously escorting the visitor to the corridor, into which the apartments opened.

The canon anxiously awaited his lord’s commentary on his brother ecclesiastic’s revelations ; and he was surprised at the earnestness with which he laboured to withstand his conclusions against Cæsar rather than his sire, which the share of Don Miguel in the tragedy irresistibly prompted. In vain he endeavoured to make it more palatable to the prince by conceding that the cruel deed had been wrought in concert with Lucrezia. In mere justice, Alfonso was compelled to admit the reasons which he had to believe that, however pleasing the result of the crime might be to her, she was not likely to have wrought it in concert with Cæsar. The canon heard with astonishment the details of the adventures of the Valley of Egeria, which established the fact of the dislike, even abhorrence, which she cherished towards the duke ; and not without a vague hope did he listen to Alfonso’s scornful description of the fascinations he had despised. But he was filled, indeed, with alarm when he learned the false confidence which Alfonso had put in the ballerina ; and it was that which induced him most diligently to search every hole and cranny of the chamber before he ventured to compose himself for the night, without in the least sharing his lord’s passionate wish that the spectre of his slaughtered predecessor would appear, and reveal the destroyer.

The night, however, passed without the least sign of intelligence from the other world ; but the morning brought startling news from that without. Rumours of tumults and disorders in the city were rife, caused by the arrival of one of the Colonnas, under sanction of an embassy from the king of Naples, bearing, it was supposed, bitter complaints of the pontiff’s leaning to the French in their projected invasion, accompanied with menaces from the Spanish sovereigns. The Colonnas were believed to project some commotion of their adherents under colour of this office, and to add to the perplexities of the pontiff, the barons had announced their determination to take the advantage of the juncture, and demand the fulfilment of their conditions in the alliance between Lucrezia and their leader. Complaints, suppressed during the first rejoicings of the Jubilee, were also expected from several other powers, even including the

French, whose representative would take the opportunity of the public audience granted to him of Naples.

In spite of all his efforts to sustain his evil opinion of Lucrezia, Alfonso was so shaken by his last discovery of the circumstances attending the death of the Prince of Salerno, that hope involuntarily mingled sunshine in his reveries, when his passions were rekindled by a message which Burchard brought from Donna Lucrezia, congratulating him on his convalescence, and hoping that he would soon be well enough to embrace his friend, the English knight, in her presence. Alfonso replied with sufficient coolness to deceive the stolid dean, that he should use all diligence to see his friend, the English knight, under such gracious observation. He then carelessly inquired if Donna Lucrezia would be present at the court held that day, which master John sighingly admitted, waited till the physicians had retired whom the dean accompanied without either nun or nurse, and then informed Bembo that he had resolved to make his appearance in it also. Knowing by experience of the tones in which the prince spoke that he was resolved, Bembo did not venture to offer any objection, though myriads occurred to him; but when Alfonso desired him to inform Le Beaufort of his intention, and to summon him to meet him publicly in the pontiff's presence, he insinuated a remonstrance, to which the knight listened with the utmost impatience.

"Tut, tut! I threaten no ill to follow!" he interrupted, with flashing eyes. "The minion will deem that I desire to hug him to the wounds he has inflicted!—But if I do, it shall not be so softly as I warrant me he hath had experience of some greetings lately, or ripe hopes ready for plucking that he shall when suspicion is lulled again or winks."

CHAPTER XXXV.

SACERDOTICM REGALE.

"This push
Will cheer me ever, or desert me now."—*Macbeth*.

About the time when the canon departed on his message to Sir Reginald, with a heavy and unwilling heart, Cæsar was himself escorting two muffled strangers, in a Spanish garb, through a back staircase of the Colonna palace, which he inhabited as his own. This passage seemed only used by himself, for he locked all the doors as he returned from his office of civility, and concealed the last key behind an old suit of armour hanging on the walls ere he rang a little bell, apparently as a signal to admit a third personage, who instantly made his entry. It was Don Migueloto, with a most gloomy and fretful visage.

"And now what says my lady-love? Thou hast the most vinegar aspect that ever Love's ambassador wore; but I know 'tis a new entreaty for my presence," said the duke, with a gaiety which the castellan thought singularly out of season. "'Tis so, by that writhe which in thy vocabulary is called a smile. But no, Migueloto, she will be better pleased that I refuse. She over-acted the part on which I set her, to learn if I loved her sufficiently to be jealous. Therefore, mark you, I am

jealous—will not see her—will not come until my fears for her safety vanquish every displeasure."

"Signor, methinks it were to your advantage if neither fear nor hope ever brought you near her again, for it brings a curse on all our enterprises, your grace having a nun for a paramour," said, Migueloto, resolutely.

"Are our enterprises cursed, then?—Why so, if success be the curse," said Cæsar, jocundly. "But though thou art something bolder than thy wont, (a good straw to show how the wind blows,) I am so far tainted with thine opinion, that I intend she shall leave Rome this very night, for which have a handsome train in readiness, with led horses, and sufficient carriage for the Sultan's wealth, which thou knowest she is supposed to possess."

"Signor, do you yield thus to the insolent fury of the Colonnas?" returned the castellan, evidently surprised.

"Their insolence and fury furnish me the pretext, and will stir her to the vengeance I meditate," replied Cæsar. "Enough of that, for the hour of the consistory approaches; but now tell me, wert thou not amazed to see so much good company in Santangelo the other night?"

"The captains of the Black Bands! I know not by what magic your grace lured them into your known stronghold," said Migueloto, very curiously.

"One which I employ on many others—perchance on thyself," said Cæsar. "I will tell thee all some day, when I would have thee smile thy sweetest; but already the spell works, and Oliverotto's report hath spread infinite mistrusts. Vitellozzo desires nothing but to leave the city, and scarcely will bide till this day's clamour is over. Yet I could find a use for a veritable magician;—tis strange that no tidings can be learned of Dom Sabbat."

"An impostor, I doubt not, who fears that your grace intends him some punishment for his sorceries with Donna Fiamma," replied the castellan, yet very dubiously.

"But then the thing that haunts me may be a fancy too, and yield to the exorcism of as unreal a spell," said Cæsar, with a troubled expression. "I would not have the people see me stand agape, and foam like an epileptic in his convulsions; and yet to assume the very robes,—his robes of gonfalonier—which I must when I head the army!—I would give a thousand golden crowns to see Dom Sabbat again."

"No diligence shall be lost, signor," replied Migueloto; "for in truth men prattle boldly enough of us now!"

"They think my sun is setting that is scarcely yet above the horizon!" said Cæsar, in a rapt tone, almost instantly reverting into his usual one. "And methinks it were not amiss to example one of the meanner railers; let me have Paschino's tongue slit to-day, the dwarf tailor of Piazza Navona, who says such witty things of us all that Machiavelli himself asks his company."

"It were little good; he will set the statues a gibbering then," replied the castellan.

"There is one before his house for the purpose,—let it be down!" returned the duke. "And that which they call Marforio, where the beggars go to exchange the lies of the city, may answer it!—A merry conversation, and the only one which I will allow on my matters in Rome. But how dismally thou starest! I'll warrant deeming all lost, as thou didst

when the mad Miriam burst upon us ! Cheer up, man, I was never in better case than I am now."

" With the French, the Spaniards, the Ferrarese, the Orsini, the Colonnas, the Pontiff, Donna Lucrezia, all on us at once !" said the castellain, with a dry Spanish shrug.

" Even so ; the first unwind of the whole web is in my hand," said Cæsar. " And yet I blame not those incredulous beards ! Come, I will give thee some comfort : know, that the Spaniards and French are driven by my provocations to the public outrages they meditate to-day, only that I may win the pontiff to my long-projected partition of Naples between them—a black treachery, which I trust will work them both a reward in years of bloodshed and mutual slaughter ! Even for this have I urged the Neapolitans to their insolence, suffered the Colonnas to enter the city ! The Orsini are my dupes, and to-day will lose for ever the favour of the pontiff, by their rebellious violence—and for Lucrezia ! Oh, thou hast not heard our Lucrezia's last project ! And thereupon pay Mona Faustina ten gold crowns ; albeit she declares that only the love of her nurseling induces her to betray her—virtue should be rewarded ! Why, man, Lucrezia is so stung with the Hospitaller's slights, that she has vowed by something that women swear by, to compel him to love her—herself—in her proper person—Lucrezia Borgia ! and then to retaliate all his disdain."

" Is he to die, then, signor ?" said the castellain, eagerly.

" Unless he lives for ever, doubtless, some day—but not until she has so far fixed her dotage upon him as to make the alliance with Ferrara, or any other, hateful to her ! Therefore I mean to aid her plans, caring meantime in a way of my own that no ill comes of it," continued Cæsar. " I shall be absent for awhile, leaving this Lombard savage's disgust and increased suspicions and Faustina ever on guard, at whose least intimation of danger it will be your charge to reveal his true errand to the pontiff, upon which, if he be not abruptly hurried out of Rome, out of a wider iniquity he will be ! But I meditate a finer stroke of nature ! Notte and Morta tell us that she attempted by a sleepy potion to prevent the Lombard from appearing against her in the tournament ; she has begun, it seems, to dabble in those tempting powers ! What if by his scorns and contempts we could drive her to his destruction—to love him so well as to slaughter him ! Smile, man, smile at the triumph of it !"

" Nay, 'tis like enough for a woman to do, and then weep her eyes out over the poor man's dust," said Migueloto.

" But we must remove an obstacle which threatens to thwart us all," returned the duke. " Faustina has a fine ear for keyholes, and I find that the Penitentiary, Fra Bruno, insists that Lucrezia, as an expiation for her fault, shall herself accuse the Ferrarese to her father. This she ferociously refuses—but she dares not long walk about in the sunshine under her confessor's wrath, so that we must either be rid of him, or resign our project."

" Would your grace—against so saintly a man—after that proof of a special providence watching over him ?" said the castellain.

" I intend him no other harm than what were perchance his safety,—for the Orsini are much enwrath'd against him, and mean to exhibit his sermon among their complaints to-day,—a few week's meditation in Santangelo," returned Cæsar. " Neither are his pratings to be suffered, scattering ill seed on these specimens of all the clays of man. Tell me, is not Fra Biccocco given to boast of his master ?"

"Your grace knows we have oft gathered intelligence from the like," returned the castellan.

"Then he shall become his accuser. Some crafty witnesses shall question him what the Penitentiary meant by averring the Orsini match fulminated from above. To-night he shall be in Santangelo, at their demand, on accusation of heresy, denying the power of the keys in the matter of Lucrezia's divorces—nay, the first, I think his conceits run on," said Cæsar, musingly. "The rest will follow—for this Hospitaller seems to be one of those pragmatical knaves who must have the whole tree, or they'll not a cherry on it!"

"Such is our Spanish fancy too, signor," said the Catalan drily.

"Yet the wild birds starve not in your country more than in Italy," replied Cæsar. "But I have no leisure to reason the matter further; thou hast thy commissions, and I must now to execute mine own."

With these words, and with a gesture which more emphatically expressed the command conveyed, Cæsar dismissed his satellite.

Purposely delaying until he knew that the court was assembled, he made his appearance in the Sala Regia among the last of the personages of any consequence who entered it, with a slow and dejected gait, very different from his usual rapidity of motion. His dress was remarkably negligent, and his countenance so haggardly pale, that it probably owed something to art.

The pontiff was seated in his usual state, surrounded by the great officers of his court; and at one of the vast gilded doors at the extremity opening into the palace stood Lucrezia, with some of her ladies, and several of the younger courtiers, among whom was Sir Reginald, as if merely in curiosity to witness the spectacle. The countenance of Le Beaufort was elate with joy, for he had not long received Bembo's message, which he had obviously misinterpreted into one of good-will, the canon purposely suppressing its covert hostility in hope that, after all, peace might be made. But Cæsar's rapid eye had detected in a remote corner the figure of the Hospitaller, in some degree disguised, by having changed his black mantle for the scarlet one worn by his order in war time, and screened by the crowd who pressed before him, and he marked with satisfaction the look with which he surveyed the distant group at the golden portal.

The ambassador from Naples was not yet admitted, but one from almost every other European power was present; and the Orsini, with a great throng of the barons of their party, were ominously gathered together in the centre of the chamber of audience. Cæsar's arrival seemed to be waited for, and many significant looks were exchanged when it was seen with what profound and almost cringing respect he saluted the assembly, and the extra warmth with which he embraced Paolo Orsino. Immediately that he had taken his place beside the pontifical throne, Burciardo received a signal, disappeared, and returned, ushering in the ambassador of Naples, Fabrizio Colonna—in himself an assurance of a displeasing embassy.

Unattended by aught but his own pride and stateliness, the dispossessed chieftain stalked into the presence of his great enemy, evincing only in his knit brows and compressed lips the strife of passions within his soul. He was clad in complete armour, except the head, which was bare, and carried the golden baton which appertained to his office as constable of Naples—a tall, thin, but muscular figure, with the strongly defined and massive features of a Roman of the antique mould.

“ The Lord Fabrizio Colonna ! we trust the message is more loyal and dutiful than the choice of a bearer would argue,” said the pontiff very harshly, observing the perceptible hesitation of Fabrizio ere he knelt in homage.

“ I am the ambassador of Naples—not now Fabrizio Colonna !” said the warrior, rising abruptly. “ When I come once more in that name to Rome—but let it pass. Holy father ! I bear the strenuous complaint and remonstrance of my lord, your faithful vassal, King Don Federigo, forasmuch as he is full well informed of the favour and encouragement your holiness affords to the Lord Louis of France, in his projected invasion of his territories, more openly apparent in the dealings of your nephew, the Duke of Romagna.”

“ Alas, my Lord Marshal d’Aubigny can furnish me with too ready a reply to this accusal, noble Fabrizio, to whom I heartily commend myself,” said Cæsar; and the Colonna cast on him a glance of unutterable loathing and hatred, such as a man might turn on some reptile, whose venom rankled in his flesh.

“ Yea, truly, Duke, you did desert us at the direst pinch of our affairs, for which my lord vows a reckoning, in the matter of Milan !” said the impetuous soldier.

“ To the pope, my sovereign, only am I bound to account for my demeanour in that urgency,” said Cæsar, submissively. “ But as also the humble vassal and lover of my lord the King of France, I intend to depart as soon as may be for Milan, to offer my excuses in person.

A general murmur of astonishment arose, and Alexander himself looked at his son with uneasiness and suspicion.

“ But, moreover, I am the bearer of this letter from the mighty kings of Spain, on behalf of their kinsman, my master,” said Fabrizio, fiercely, “ which being perused, may perchance spare his grace the trouble of a journey to Milan. My Lord Datary, you are skilful in parchment hand, I pray you read it.”

The Datary mechanically took a paper offered to him, but receiving a nod from Cæsar, he cut the silk which tied the epistle, and read it aloud, giving by his manner of delivery additional weight to the offensive parts of the contents. It was one long string of complaints and reproaches, couched in terms of feigned humility, in which the Spanish sovereigns upbraided the pontiff with his preference of the French, declared their determination to support the King of Naples against all enemies, denounced the Duke of Romagna as the cause and promoter of all the acts inimical to the Spanish interests, and in conclusion threateningly implored the pontiff to make him resume the ecclesiastical life he had quitted.

“ Alas ! what will become of my young bride if ye make a monk of me ?” said Cæsar, without even smiling, while the courtiers laughed outright.

“ We will endeavour not to forget you are an ambassador, Lord Fabrizio; but be brief in what you have yet to add !” said Alexander, with extreme difficulty bridling his wrath, and rebuking the untimely mirth with a glance.

“ The rest is of less weight, but my lord permits me to urge two matters on your holiness’s justice, in his name,” said Fabrizio, darkening to the most ghastly hue of suppressed passion. “ I demand that the laws of God and man be put into execution against the woman called, to the eternal blush of our name, Fiamma Colonna, once a nun, whom your tribunals

have condemned as the paramour of an accursed paynim; and the restoration of the wrongfully seized and tyrannously forfeited estates, honours, and wealth of our house!"

"Merciless Ghibelline! art thou not satisfied with the blood which thou and thy faction have so long drained from every pore of this land, but must also thy brother's blood, flowing in the veins of a most miserable woman, be shed to appease its thirst?" exclaimed Alexander, yielding to his anger. "Begone from our presence, and as soon as may be from the city, or your name of ambassador shall scarcely protect your substance of traitor!"

"Nay, holy father, even we, the Orsini, earnestly entreat you to restore the Colonnas to your paternal favour and their inheritance," said the Duke of Gravina, stepping forward with his hand on his sword, an habitual gesture with him when he spoke with any vehemence. "We would have your holiness apply a general bandage to the wounds of the state; and in truth Rome bleeds fast from these of the Colonnas."

Alexander stared with an instant's amazement at this unexpected and most dangerous sign of concert between the ancient and hereditary enemies, by means of whose disunion only he had suppressed the power of one.

"This is a new matter indeed! Colonna and Orsino knitting claws—tiger and bear!" exclaimed the pontiff at last. "But I forget; your cause is in reality one; your quarrel is only who shall devour the prey when it is torn to pieces."

"Holy father, we desire but to intercede for the Colonnas humbly and wofully as befits your merest vassals," said the Duke of Urbino, plucking back his ally of Gravina; "and for ourselves, we still more submissively beseech of your paternity the ratification of the peace already concluded with Duke Cæsar, which Love and Hymen are ready to bind in chains of flowers stronger than adamant. Grant us only this gentle confirmation—the hand of your most serene and beautiful niece, in recompence of the Lord Paolo's long-devoted love—and we ask no more."

"Lucrezia!—she shall herself answer ye," said Alexander, turning and waving his hand impatiently to the lady to advance. "Win her consent, and we have frequently declared our own shall not lag behind. Lucrezia!—but what mean ye? That we should rise and drag our child to the altar, whither the loadstone of love only should lure woman to debase herself to the earthy nature of man!"

"'Tis not indeed to be desired that your paternity should play the wooer in this matter," said Fabrizio, with a meaning couched in his tones which was lost on few present. Lucrezia was advancing with an expression of disdain and melancholy playing over her features, in unwilling obedience, when the words struck her ear. A spot of fire burst like a star on her brow, and rapidly crimsoned downward; she pressed her clenched hands to her bosom, and cowered her face upon them with a natural gesture of the most agonizing shame; but instantly conscious of the interpretation which might be put on her action, her proud spirit rallied as it had yielded. With a bright flashing glance of contempt and defiance at the Colonna, her fine lip and nostril instinct like a celestial's with a beautiful ire, she quickened her step, the courtiers making way for her with emulous rapidity, until she reached the steps of the throne, on which sat Alexander, in awful silence, the fierceness of his nature struggling with its policy that counselled the prudence of not affecting to perceive the Colonna's black innuendo.

"Holy father, I am here, to obey your holiness's command in this and in all things, save where obedience is but its own counterfeit, as to profess with the lips what the heart disavows," she said, in her sweet but now firm and resolved tones. "Rather than which, since I am the cause of so much trouble and turmoil to your paternity, let me retire and end my days in peace in some nunnery—remote from all."

"Signor, if this request is listened to—which 'tis well known Donna Lucrezia can but propound in jest—neither I nor my friends but must needs conclude—it must be that the glorious hope was only extended to lure us into some pitfall—to plunge me into eternal misery; for without this guarantee, friends, barons, Vitellozzo, Urbino! we cannot, we ought not, we will not be satisfied!" was the broken harangue of Paolo Orsino, his visage flaming like a comet's, and with his hair tossed as disorderedly about in his agitation.

"So think we all!" shouted Vitellozzo. "We will accept no other pledge of your holiness's good faith! We have been cheated too often with snow for barley!"

"Rebellious vassal, thou liest!" exclaimed Alexander, turning furiously to the speaker. "Thou and thy fellow-robbers repay us with this insolence only for too much lenity and forbearance. But we will take a lesson now which shall last us for the remainder of our time."

"Signor, we complain not on idle surmises," said the Orsino, striving to restrain his own vehemence. "In your very presence, as if by some potent command, a monk is suffered to preach heresies against us, denying your supreme powers before the whole Christian world! And it is known—the Lady Lucrezia herself will not deny it—an envoy from Ferrara is among us, who has been honoured with her repeated private audience."

"What says our fair sister to this? What private audiences are these we hear of?" said the duke, in a tone apparently of playful mockery, as if he did not credit the statement.

"Peace, malapert boy! and let our niece reply," said Alexander, looking with surprise and suspicion at Lucrezia, whose quivering lip and rapid changes of complexion confessed some secret consciousness. In her exceeding dread for the safety of the Hospitaller from her father's wrath, if what she believed to be his real mission were betrayed, and almost equal fear of the shame which her own share in the adventure seemed to entail—Lucrezia had no resource but to admit the statement, with feminine tact counteracting its effects as much as possible.

"There is indeed, we have learned, one in Rome from Ferrara, who hath a mission concerning us," she said, with visible hesitation; "but to prove the little weight we attached to it—the little the Orsini have to dread from it—we have not yet judged it necessary even to mention it to his paternity, contenting ourselves with vague replies to vague demands and questionings."

"Our Lady preserve us, since women, too, are taking it upon them to sovereign it in our place!" said Alexander, passionately. "But who is this envoy, and where may he be found?"

Cæsar glanced expressively at the Orsino as if bidding him remark how well the farce was played.

"I am bound by solemn promise to secrecy, unless to your paternity only," replied Lucrezia, much agitated. "It is enough that I solemnly assure the Lord Orsino that the envoy's mission, so far as I know or desire, has failed, and shall continue to fail, unless falsehood can become truth."

"And on this assurance 'tis fit you rest content, Lord Paolo," said Cæsar, with his crafty glance. "But for your complaint concerning the seditious monk, if you can allege evidence, I am of opinion that the Datary should inquire into it."

"Even so; let it be done," said Alexander, sharply; and a general glance fell on Lucrezia, as if they expected some intercession on her part; and indeed she began to speak, but she broke off suddenly, turning very pale.

"On no assurance can my soul rest content but in the possession of its sole object, sole hope, sole everything!" replied Paolo, with wild vehemence.

"Oh, wherefore will you drive me to extremity?" exclaimed Lucrezia, beseechingly. "Surely all knighthood and manhood are mingled ignobly now, since even the victor in so renowned a day of chivalry thinks it meet to woo his lady with threats instead of the gentle arts of love!"

"Teach me then how to woo thee, young celestial! for men have but learned how to woo women!" said the Orsino, kneeling in the adoration of his frenzied passion, and fervently clasping his hands.

"Lady your pardon—but he who kneels before you is not the victor in that day, not of chivalry, but of all foul treachery!" said the Hospitaller, who had witnessed the dextrous screening of Lucrezia with only increased wrath, imputing it to her dread of her father rather than to any desire to shelter him.

"Wherefore not, my lord, since your accident—since Sir Reginald himself—yielded it to the Lord Orsino?" said Lucrezia, starting as if she had seen a spectre, her face, bosom, and hands whitening as if to stone.

"Then to him of the two—or to both since they love to tilt in company—who shall dare to maintain that I have fairly lost, or that he has fairly won the crown of the tournament of the Colosseum, I throw this glove of mine, in token that he lies in his teeth—on which quarrel I will battle to the last drop of my blood!" said the Hospitaller, dashing his steel glove with such violence on the marble floor that it rebounded over the kneeling Orsino, and fell at the feet of the Duke of Romagna.

"Marry, it knows its way, for I am or was judge of the hurtle!" said Cæsar, smiling as he lifted the gage. "The women may take what part they list, according to complexions; but comfort thee, knight, for until I have to Milan, and counselled on this cause with the noble and impartial chivalry of France, no man shall achieve the prize; and as they decide so will I, and so mayst thou."

"Brother of St. John! can it be thou wouldest have men think I took the vantage of thee in that luckless thrust?" said Sir Reginald, impetuously advancing.

"Only demanding of your grace to deliver my glove with the wreath, I cheerfully abide your award," said Alfonso, turning disdainfully away, without deigning any reply.

"By Heaven, then, I renew my claims to the one for the sake of the other," said Le Beaufort, kindling with passion.

"Nay, sirs, you must pledge me your faith to keep peace among you until I pronounce my judgment," said Cæsar, smiling to see how furiously the rivals surveyed each other.

"We ladies will care for that; until your return (if it be true indeed you go to Milan) the Knight of St. John shall be our prisoner here in the

Vatican," said Lucrezia, with great agitation, but attempting an air of carelessness and gaiety; while her blush restored such gorgeous bloom to her beauty that Alfonso's jealousy rekindled to its fiercest glow. "Faith and troth, sir Knight of Disdain!" she continued, without raising her eyes, "the shock of battle was no assay for the metal of which you boast yourself, but the furnace and glow of beauty and love's temptations—to which my fair court shall subject you in this pause permitted us, if you dare abide the brunt?"

"Lady, I do not fear a defeated enemy!" replied the knight, with a scornful glance; and Lucrezia's smile lost its sweetness, and writhed over her lips like the glisten of a serpent.

"Behold ye, damsels, he hath thrown ye the gauntlet too!—subdue this rebel, or I shall myself begin to think it possible to throw off your yoke!" said Cæsar, playfully. "I give the knight into your custody until ye see me again; and look that ye restore him to me in as fair condition—nay, I trust, in better, than I yield him now to your mercy."

General murmurs of approval, except from the Orsini, were audible; and Alfonso bent in submission, eagerly expecting that the evil passions in Alexander's breast would betray themselves in his refusal to sanction the singular challenge. But infinitely to his surprise, he at first laughed at the project, and then more seriously added, "It contents us well, for we fear the knight's zeal in a recent matter may have stirred him enemies, and his safety will be best assured in the Vatican."

This open collusion shook the last grain of patience out of the Orsino's breast. "My lord! since Sir Reginald courteously yielded me the prize, it shames me that it is not delivered to me, as if our stroke were indeed given in concert and treachery," he exclaimed. "And if every other good be snatched from me, my honour is still mine own, and none shall ravish it from me."

"If you desire not to anger me so as to make your hopes for ever in vain, Orsino, you shall abide the judgment of the French knights," said Lucrezia, with warmth.

"Content you, Lord Paolo," said Fabrizio, who had been listening in silent disdain to the whole dialogue. "Content you! a former peace was cemented by this lady's marriage with one whose royal blood still cries out in vain for vengeance, shed in the Vatican, by hands perchance as lily fair and spotless to look at as that you crave so passionately."

This last insult was too much for the patience of Alexander, never very extensive, and which only the pressing difficulties which surrounded him had hitherto sustained. "Traitors and rebels!" he shouted, "Begone, ere I order ye to be thrown out on the spears of my guards!"

"This as the reply to my private plaints; but to those of the king, my master, what answers your paternity?" said Fabrizio, in an unmoved tone. "Yet the Colonnas are not so unfriended in Rome as your holiness may imagine."

"To the king your master then, and our insolent vassal,—to all the kings of the earth,—I reply—that I have been elected by God the Almighty, and not by men, to be the father and controller of princes; and such I am, despite all enmity! That it becomes not the father's dignity to succumb to the caprice of his children, but it is the duty of children to obey their father's commands; and therefore I will never esteem them as lawful sons, but misbegotten bastards, who shall gainsay what I do."

"By the faith of my body, holy father," exclaimed Fabrizio, with rash

violence, "there are abundance of bastards already in the church, without lugging in more!"

"My Swiss!—But, no; let some one remove him that would have him safe!" said Alexander, whitening with passion.

"And in conclusion, it is in my instruction to tell your paternity," continued the unmoved Fabrizio, "that thinking and acting as you do, solely with a view to the aggrandizement of your race, to the ruin of the church, in utter contempt and defiance of all reason and justice, having banished all fit counsel from the realm, and plotting his unjust dethronement, King Don Federigo sends you his defiance; and the most Catholic kings of Spain aver, that if you persist in your treacherous complot to that effect with France, they will deny and no longer acknowledge you to be the common father of Christians; and this protestation I go to lodge with your principal Notary Public."

"And this is my recompense for bestowing on the Spanish kings half of this new-found world!" said Alexander, furiously. "But I would have them know that in my youth I studied the Roman law, and remember to have read that the ingratitude of the receiver gives the granter a right to reclaim his gift!"

"If your holiness had studied the canon law with equal profit, you would have found there are worse crimes threatened with worse penalties, and your daughter would not have had so many husbands!" retorted the half-maddened Colonna. "But my Lady Lucrezia here would shrink at the word,—so we'll be silent till the skies themselves begin to clatter it!"

For a moment, suffocated with the violence of his anger, Alexander actually gasped for breath, and then springing up from his throne, he shouted "Guards! Swiss!" with so loud a voice that the halberdiers stationed at the entrances burst in with their spears lowered, expecting that the pontiff was attacked. But before Alexander could shape his furious intents in words, Lucrezia was kneeling at his feet and supplicating his forbearance; Cæsar, the cardinals, and ambassadors all uniting in entreaties.

Alexander's reason was frequently a counterpoise even to his violent passions; and speaking now in the voice of his beloved daughter, it exercised a powerful and unexpected influence. "Thou sayest truly, my child! dearer to my heart than the life blood that warms it!" he said, after a terrible pause. "It becomes not our majesty to altercation with traitors and rebels—wherefore we will leave these to choke in their own venom, giving them till sunset to make their protestations, when if we find them out of their holes, rather than miss their destruction we will set the very stubble of their mowed faction on fire!"

Then descending the steps of the throne, as if in more signal scorn of the upbraidings of his adversaries, the pontiff took his daughter's hand, and strode with the step of an angry warrior rather than of a priest to the golden portal. There he turned to give a parting look of defiance, without in the least noticing the kneeling homage of his courtiers, his fierce gaze glaring on the stiff and upright Colonna; and there the Hospitaller noted that Lucrezia beckoned almost imperceptibly to Le Beaufort, dropping her kerchief purposely as she entered the portal.

The young knight immediately darted forward, raised the embroidered woof, and as he hastened after the fair owner to restore it, the portals swung to, and the audience were left staring at each other.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"But, oh! what damned minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves."—*Othello*.

Never were reflections more involved and perplexed than those with which Alfonso reviewed the circumstances of the extraordinary scene above detailed, in connexion with his recent adventures and ancient suspicions. The continued chasing of the whole stream of his discoveries against Cæsar alone; the security with which the aged pontiff assented to his daughter's caprice, which admitted a handsome and young man, for whom she had already betrayed a regard, into her frequent presence and close neighbourhood; Lucrezia's evident zeal for his safety, her affectionate attendance in the character of the nun, so incompatible with the hatred which he imagined had induced her to seek his life; no effort of prejudice could make these jarring chords harmonize. The recollection of her infinite fascinations now worked so powerfully in his soul that the knight laboured to disgust himself by the thought that the licentious beauty still projected his conquest; an idea which he cherished the more pertinaciously as it offered some assurance against his fears of Sir Reginald's new favour.

While these fairer thoughts continued to spread their light over his suspicions, Alfonso scarcely knew whether to be alarmed or pleased with the exposition he had witnessed of the unsubstantial nature of the Borgian power, and the ruin which seemed to threaten their grandeur. He endeavoured to persuade himself, by rejoicing in it, that he had abandoned all thought of Lucrezia; but the panic which visited him when, by the news which were shortly promulgated in Rome, it seemed that the Borgias themselves acknowledged their own downfall, might have convinced him to the contrary.

After a long council held in the Vatican, rumours were current that the Duke of Romagna was actively engaged in attempts to bring about a reconciliation with the discontented barons. The extremity of the peril appeared in the terms to which the Borgias submitted, and which one after the other fell upon the astonished ears of politicians, like the louder and louder rumble of approaching thunder. Suddenly, Paolo Orsino was declared Senator of Rome; an office which his family had long sought in vain, and which gave him an almost unlimited authority in the city. Immediately after, the fanatic populace were thrown into ferment by tidings that the Penitentiary, Fra Bruno, was seized in his hermitage and sent to Sant'Angelo, on charge of preaching heretic and seditious doctrine against the projected marriage. A still greater marvel, their support prevailed more in favour of the Colonnas than the entreaties of the Spanish and Neapolitan kings had yet availed. Fabrizio received intimation that, on the formal surrender of their fiefs to the church, all should be restored to the Colonnas; and to dissipate, it was asserted, the scandalous reports concerning their niece, Douna Fiamma, certain stipulations being made for her safety, she was ordered to quit Rome, with all her wealth, and to retire to Capua, in the dominion of Naples. On these concessions, Fa-

brizio discontinued the mutinous assemblies of his adherents, and returned to Naples, to consult with the other exiles of his family.

Undreaming of the use to which Cæsar had put his presence in Rome, in deceiving the barons into the belief of the pontiff's underhand dealings with Ferrara; still less the motives of his apparently desperate intention of placing his person in the power of the exasperated French; Alfonso could not but share Bembo's apprehensions, that the immediate conclusion of the marriage with their heir was among the Orsini stipulations. This was farther confirmed by tidings that Vitellozzo was to leave Rome with his legions—a measure betokening the confidence of the barons. And then indeed was Alfonso's soul tossed about in a stormy sea of contrary passions and impulses; and to finish his agitation, on the evening of the council, Burchard summoned him in a secret and mysterious manner to the pontiff's presence in the adjoining palace inhabited by Donna Lucrezia, with whom he usually supped. He doubted not that the interview was concerning his supposed embassy; and in what light Lucrezia had represented it he could only conjecture; so that not unreasonably a direful thought assailed him, that she had contrived all that had happened in order to consummate her vengeance more terribly, by betraying him to her sire, and rousing his vindictive passions to their wildest excess. In his dark musings the thought occurred to him that the transcendantly guilty pair intended to sacrifice him in some fell manner, which should strike terror into all who in future ventured to pry into their misdeeds. But the certainty which he felt that, if such were the project, even the discovery of his real rank and name would only deepen the wrath of the criminals, the impossibility of resistance, and his natural courage, enabled him to comply with Burchard's message, and to follow him without much more than a momentary hesitation.

Traversing a long corridor, they entered a vast and magnificent suite of chambers, overlooking the luxurious gardens of Vatican and a considerable portion of the distant city. The pomp, the bloom, the fragrance, the noble panorama from window to window, were unnoticed by the agitated Hospitaller; and when Burchard raised the purple hangings into a saloon in which he was informed the pontiff was at supper, his hand was on his sword, as if he expected a sudden onset of assassins. But none appeared; and Burchard laid his finger on his lips to enjoin silence, when, stepping in, it was audible that Lucrezia was singing, and with the charmed voice of the ballerina of the capitol.

Alfonso's soul darkened, when in those bewitching and subduing tones he felt that the magic was again exercised to which his own angry and perturbed spirit had formerly yielded, and saw that the pontiff's countenance resembled a storm-vexed sky calming in the soft evening light. The entrance of the dean with his charge was not apparently observed, for Alexander's eyes were fixed in a deep and mournful reverie on his daughter, although the air she sung was brisk and full of gaiety—a Spanish roundel, the termination of which was ever

*“El villano al tamboril,
Y el paysan à las sonjas!”*

and Lucrezia's head was turned away, seated at the foot of a spacious couch of wrought velvet on which Alexander reclined. A window between two lofty pillars, emblazoned with a rich Gothic painting, was partially opened, admitting a cool, flowery breeze from the gardens below;

and beneath it was a table spread with confections, fruit, wine, and flowers. At a very respectful distance sat Mona Faustina, knitting lace, and but for the evil pucker of her lips, a most respectable matron to look at—on whose presence Alfonso put no stress. Yet, though he analyzed the expression of the pontiff's gaze with the severest tests of moral chemistry, he could detect no evil in the depths of its serene and sorrowful tenderness.

It might be that some sound of their entrance came to the fine organs of Lucrezia, for Alfonso remarked with trouble that she glided farther down the couch, and broke off in the midst of the lively air. “Ay de mí! but your paternity seems not in the tune of this country merriment, nor in truth is your minstrel!” she said very sweetly, and yet with a sigh. “Nor have I sung you my little silly ballad of two lovers who, forsooth, would part, though none bade them but their own waywardness!”

“Thou canst do, nor say, nor sing, nor verily, I deem, think, aught that is not sprinkled with something heavenly sweet, my ownest Lucrezia!” said Alexander, fondly. “But 'tis true—though it minds me of sounds anciently familiar—that merry, castanet-snapping air jars with my present mood.”

“Then, dear my lord, the sighaways of these two loving quarrellers, that bade each other farewell for ever, will lamentably chime in with it,” said Lucrezia, playfully.

“Nay, my Lucrezia! call me not lord now—let me hear that word which on thy lips floods my heart with such a sweet and holy happiness that I marvel what punishment heaven can have in store to balance it; call me thy father—thy dear father, if thou wilt!” said Alexander.

“My father,—yes, my father!” said Lucrezia, confusedly, and without the affectionate epithet: but suddenly adding with warmth, yielding to an impulse at once of pride and tenderness, “My most dear, all dear father! for you are all to me! I have none to love me but only you, who love me better than all could!—But to my ballad, for I am a true poet at least in this—that I must perforce have listeners, or my song is silence. 'Tis the damsel swans it!”

And she sung, in those most tender and melting tones which nature had given her in harmony with her perfect beauty, some Italian verses, which might run thus in our ruder tongue:—

I.

“Though we part, and part unkindly,
Though we ne'er will meet again,—
Hating as we loved—too blindly,
Breathes that thought to thee no pain?
Though Love's sun has set for ever,
Should no lingering light remain?”

II.

“By that moment's inmost darling,
When we changed Love's vainest plight,—
And blushed like earth and heaven parting
From their rapt embrace in light!
Oh, more slowly should it, setting,
Reconcile our souls to-night!”

“But I'll no more of it, since it troubles my father,” she said, breaking off suddenly, and with much emotion in her own voice.

“Nay, it was but one word—parting—and a thought which came over me!” said Alexander, mournfully. “But wherever thou art, my child,

thy love needs not forsake me, and shall be the angel to smooth my pillow of death."

"I pray you, my father, talk not so sadly, or what can I but weep?" said Lucrezia, with tears indeed.

"Nay, even thou canst not deny, my Lucrezia, that two-and-seventy winters begin to count on me now—but that is not all!" the pontiff replied, in a gloomily musing tone. "There were justice in it too!—What did I say?—But let it pass, only, ere 'tis too late,—I could encounter fate more cheerfully to know that thou wert safe from every harm!"

"Let us think of aught else;—here is my nurse's favourite seguidilla, that she used to laugh to hear me sing when I could scarcely run," said Lucrezia, striving to resume her usual tone of gaiety.

"The grief and the anguish
Are over!
And the heart is once more,
As it was before,
Ere for one it would foolishly languish,
A rover!"

"Ay, would she—when it was a mere plaything!" said Mona Faustina, half laughing and half crying, with a strange mixture of feelings.

A sigh, which Alfonso could not suppress, interrupted the lady, and gave her a pretence to notice his presence.

"The Knight of St. John is here!" she exclaimed, turning; and in a very rapid and confused manner continued—"Signor, approach!—I have explained to his holiness what I have myself learned from your friend of the Valley of Egeria, that your mission in Rome is but to ascertain the true condition of affairs among us—regarding me—the reports which—and I have placed you in a position where your own observations (for methinks you are very subtle!) may better guide you than from the remoteness you affected—while your person is in safety, for his paternity commands you not to leave the palace without the attendance which shall be placed at your disposal."

The imploring and yet haughty glance which accompanied these words—the danger and difficulty in which any denial would involve both himself and the lady—the defiance implied—utterly confused Alfonso. Yet he was unwilling to make what should seem the least concession to her will, or become her accomplice in a deception, though practised altogether in his own service—and he was silent.

Luckily Alexander was busied with his own thoughts, and he looked round at Mona Faustina, who instantly arose and left the apartment. "She is practised!" thought the dark scrutinizer, vacantly watching the old lady out, who retired into a chamber of which he caught a momentary glimpse, half unconsciously remembering that he noticed in the distance an alcove hung with gold-coloured satin, most richly embroidered and adorned with little figures of the Apostles and Madonna, in silver, and that the ceiling was painted with an Aurora meeting Night—a suitable subject to salute the eyes of a sleeper waking.

"Good son, your cautious, though something too elaborate, are justified," said Alexander, as the matron retired. "But notwithstanding all appearance to the contrary—if it be true that Duke Hercules still cherishes the project which was once our own, bide with us for a time, until we can explain ourselves more fully, and he shall learn that our heart has never with sincerity abandoned it."

So easily could this point be admitted, that to deny wou'd have been a falsehood; and Alfonso was irresistibly urged by his fears of the Orsini alliance to endeavour to discover how far it was advanced.

"Nothing is more true, holy father, than that the duke's heart is still entirely devoted to the project which you once deigned to entertain," he replied. "But what can that matter, or my longer abidance, since none can doubt that the marriage of your most illustrious niece with Paolo Orsino is determined?"

"Peace, peace!—for after the experience I have had of their undutiful and rebellious spirit,—allying themselves with the Colonnas, and with the protectors of the bestial ballad-mongers of Naples,—let your masters rest assured nothing but necessity shall drive me to it!" exclaimed Alexander, impatiently; adding with a triumphant and wrathful expression, "But until the result of the Duke of Romagna's mission is known, all discussion on this point is adjourned; and then—but meanwhile, certes, the want of other assistance may bring about that necessity,—therefore let me have more definite speech from Ferrara, if he would have me understand him to a purpose. To his encouragement at this time let him know you are our guest, and that, in the presence of his daughter—yea, of his daughter!—the sovereign pontiff declared that among all the princes of Italy Alfonso of Ferrara is still regarded by him as the only one worthy of her!—whose brave person and commanding genius are alike fitted to sway her to the love and reverence which a wife should render to her lord. You behold her beauty, signor, and albeit you guess not at the full richness of the treasury which is in her heart and mind, what I have said is no ill compliment to your prince!"

A suspicion instantaneously struck Alfonso that his rank had been revealed, and that this was a cajolery which the perilous condition of the Borgias suggested to them as means to win a powerful aid—for he was resolved not to believe in the sincerity of the pontiff's desire to wed his daughter at such a distance. But it was as impossible to doubt the contrary evidence of Lucrezia's reply and manner. "Señor," she said, the white satin of her skin suffusing all over with a pinky tinge, "the love of women is seldom won by disdain!—and I am informed the Prince of Ferrara is but an unwilling hearkener to his father's wishes. Ere we talk of love to him, let him talk of love to us!"

"It were indeed the fitter style, illustrious lady!" replied Alfonso, with a glance full of reminiscences of the Valley of Egeria, which Lucrezia felt to the quick of her fine senses. "But your anger confirms Duke Hercules' apprehensions of the little favour which the house of Este now finds in Rome!"

"What talk you of favour, knight!" said Alexander, vehemently, "when I commission you to tell your masters from me, that I still cherish such kindness for their house, as to desire to transfer to it this comfort and glory of my age, this brightness, this sweetness, this mere perfection of her sex, which envy itself cannot deny my Lucrezia to be!"

"Signor, I pray you!" said the lady, bending confusedly over her instrument. "Master dean, this is all his holiness desired to say."

Burchard took the hint, and retired with the Hospitaller, whose cogitations were still more perplexed by the interview. It was scarcely possible to doubt the sincerity of the pontiff's eagerness to renew the alliance with Ferrara; and it seemed a strong argument in Lucrezia's favour, that, knowing the envoy's real intents, she had purposely brought him

to a position of close and intimate observation. But Cæsar's conduct was the most inexplicable, if he really intended to suffer him to remain with Lucrezia, after the events of which he was cognizant. It was true, indeed, that he had also witnessed the display of Alfonso's contempt and aversion, that he had a vigilant spy in Mona Faustina, and that he had heard his statement of his pretended embassy. Joining all these facts, the terrible thought occurred to Alfonso that he permitted his residence in the palace to give him facilities to satisfy himself of the truth of the allegations against Lucrezia and the pontiff. To the contrary, Bembo was haunted by apprehensions that some attempt would be made by the remorseless duke on his lord's life, more especially as Burchard brought renewed orders to him not to stir abroad without a guard.

Uncertain what else to do, Alfonso complied with this injunction, and remained for several days secluded in his sumptuous solitude, his wounds meanwhile healing fast. In this space Lucrezia seemed to have forgotten his existence; he heard only, and with renewed heart-burning, that she shared in all the festivities of the jubilee, and that Le Beaufort was always in her retinue. The close of the jubilee and Cæsar's departure were to take place on the same day, and on that previous, Alfonso learned that he was to give a great feast to the papal court and the Orsini, in public token of their reconciliation, and to divert the people in the evening with a grand spectacle of a *Mystery* or *Religious Play*. It was the evening before this event, and Alfonso was soothing himself with the hope that Lucrezia affected this oblivion to deceive her terrible brother—an opinion in which Bembo heartily coincided—when the door opened, and the duke himself entered, alone, and unannounced. The canon stared at him in vacant alarm, as if he expected an immediate murder.

"Trouble not for me, signor canon; I come but to leave my good wishes with your valiant friend, and to press him, if it may be, to witness our show to-morrow," said Cæsar, with the princely courtesy which he could well assume. "And also I have a little grace to ask of him, which my modesty can less stammeringly demand alone."

To this broad hint Bembo replied with a most rueful and terrified "My lord, your wish is a command!" but without making the least motion to comply with it.

"Like most of my commands then, now," said Cæsar, smiling carelessly. "Come, I will finish your game at chess with the knight, three more moves will lose it; or are you fearful to be alone in these dismal chambers?"

"Wherefore should your grace so style a magnificence which a king might be proud to inhabit?" said Alfonso.

"Nay, if you know not, your slumbers are the lighter," replied Cæsar, more gravely. "But are we to be beholden to you, signor canon, for the license we crave?"

Bembo looked affrightedly at his lord, who replied, with a quiet glance at his dagger, "Yea brother, I feel no faintness now—and from yonder window you can easily come to my aid, if I should."

Bembo retired with visible reluctance, moving backward like a crab, as if in profound respect, but in reality to leave the duke no instant for any evil purpose.

"I would speak to you of a woman, and the subject asks for privacy," said Cæsar, as the canon moved out of earshot, and changing his whole manner into one of gloom and thoughtfulness. "But heaven forbid,

indeed, that this chamber should not be of better augury to you than to its last luckless possessor."

"Then do I marvel, signor, that your discourse should be addressed to me, so all unskilled in female matters," said Alfonso, visibly astonished.

"It suffices me that I have observed in you the rigid practice of a virtue once the chief ornament of our Roman women, but whose very name makes them laugh now-a-days," said Cæsar, laughing too, but bitterly. "Therefore I would have you, during my absence, be in some wise a guard and watch over a lady who is said to be dear to me, very dear, too dear, and she is all!" he continued, even he, with some confusion under the gaze of the Hospitaller. "There is one whom you have, it may be, little cause to love—the vapouring English knight—but whom the memory of antique friendship may yet sway you to desire to preserve from a great snare and destruction."

The Hospitaller's agitated look, rather than his words, replied.

"The young man is handsome and daring, and—albeit my heart burns in fire to say it—I cannot contradict the general voice of Italy," continued the duke, musingly. "Yea, there are more tales to be told of this lady's pleasurable despots than would furnish forth the hundred amorous legends of a new Boccaccio! Yet some, perchance, of too black a hue to mingle in such sun-steeped reveries. Warn the rash boy of the north to take no courage from my departure! I too have a rival, whose dark vigilance is never long foiled. Let him know that; for albeit the chastisement is certain, it irks me that it should be deserved, and I am weary of bloodshed and evil report."

"What mighty rival can this be, or what damsel? Methought your grace was least of all men likely to endure one?" said Alfonso, shuddering in his inmost soul.

"One whom I must endure may well make this rash stranger tremble—and such he is," replied Cæsar, with a satanic meaning in his eye. "And, in recompense, I will bestow on you a warning, for I misdoubt you have roused a vengeance which, Circe-like, shall fantastically blend the heights of joy and anguish and direness—as when, it seems, they bade the pretty Jewess invite my brother to his delightsome slaughterhouse. Nay, my tongue wags idly! but I have caught an evil custom to prate on all things, in France. You guessed not what festering horror you stirred, moving in Gandia's death, with thought, no doubt, to win his holiness's kindness! Beware how you meddle more in it!"

"I dare not guess at the subject of these dreads; but deems your highness that I am of the stuff of which they make domestic espials and traitors?" said Alfonso, almost betraying the indignation and horror in his heart, for he perceived that Cæsar's expressions were purposely contrived to make him believe that his fearful love had been successful, and was still more detestably rivalled, and all the mightiest passions in his soul were stirred, when, remembering the malignant falsehood of the one insinuation, he began almost to hope in the possibility of Lucrezia's innocence in the other.

"Not so, most noble knight! I ask of you only what your virtue and Christian compassion might equally prompt," replied Cæsar. "I avow to you that I leave an indefatigable watch in the person of Mona Faustina, who is bound to me by some ties of interest, and moreover I have two of her sons in my train. If this foolish youth, once your friend, grows too insolent, is it possible that you will refuse to drop a word of warning to

prevent the ruin which must ensue, when the vigilant confidante informs you 'tis needful?"

This was a master-tangle which fairly enmeshed the Hospitaller, and Cæsar smiled inwardly at the confused silence which his victim observed, and which yet accepted the office thus prettily gilded with words. Cæsar, satisfied that he had done all the mischief that he projected, instantly shifted the conversation by inviting the knight to his farewell banquet; from which he excused himself by alleging the pain which he still suffered from his wounds. Blaming himself for protracting the interview, unmindful of the circumstance, the duke then took a most friendly adieu, and retired, to the unbounded satisfaction of the canon.

The discourse had renewed to their wildest raging all the passions in Alfonso's soul, and deepened his suspicions both of the pontiff and Sir Reginald, finding them so blackly shared by the Borgia, and collating all circumstances together. In vain did Bembo urge Alexander's desire to renew the proposals with Ferrara. Alfonso declared that it was only a trick to gain allies in the dangerous position in which the Borgian power was placed; a last card to be reserved against the detested necessity of resigning Lucrezia to the Orsini. Even her project on himself, wherein he had founded his chief security against Le Beaufort, was now only a refinement of the most horrible cruelty and revenge. And yet Bembo took a little hope from his lord's conclusion, that he would obtain some *positive* proof against her, and then leave Rome for ever.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"As one who drinks from a charmed cup,
Of foaming and sparkling and murmuring wine,
While a mighty Enchantress filling up,
Invites to love with her lips divine."—SHELLEY.

William of Bampton, the ancient servitor who performed the functions of squire with Le Beaufort, and who commanded his little band of men-at-arms under him, seemed only to wait for the disastrous termination of the tournament to add to the young knight's troubles. He had been chosen, from his age and fidelity, rather as a guide and controller of the hot youth than merely to fulfil the duties of his service; but he exhibited little skill in the time or manner in which he now thought proper to vent a discontent of some standing. Secretly—it might almost be said even to himself—fired with a passion which the voluptuous climate was fast making irresistible; flushed with the applause of Lucrezia and with the glory and universal admiration he had just acquired in her sight; exasperated with Alfonso's revilings and open hostility; it may be thought that it was with much concealed impatience that, on the morning after the tournament, Le Beaufort listened to a long general tirade against the women of all foreign lands, and those of Italy in particular, in which the squire indulged. But he dared not attempt to refute these dogmata, more especially as Bampton passed, by some unspoken transition, to the praises of his cousin and betrothed, the Lady Alice Beaufort, and abruptly declared that he ought to lose no time in procuring the dispensation for

their union, which his favour with the pope's niece would enable him easily to obtain.

The observation was so true, and there was that in the old man's eye and in his own heart which so seconded the argument, that, in a moment of shame and alarm, Sir Reginald promised to apply for the dispensation immediately. But several days elapsed, and though he was continually in Lucrezia's society, and importuned by the faithful squire, he had never once opened his mouth on the subject to her. Yet it is perfectly true that he never entered the Vatican without convincing himself that he meant to make the application; but no sooner was he in it than all resolutions relating to the subject, and often all recollections, vanished from his mind. Unluckily Bampton himself furnished him with an argument against his own, by urging the danger of a longer tariance in Italy after having provoked the wrath of the powerful princes of Ferrara. Sir Reginald fired at the thought of retiring from motives of personal fear, and the events of the Consistory gave him a reasonable plea; and when Bampton imagined he had gained a great point in prevailing upon him to promise that he would leave Rome directly the affair of the prize was decided, and would meanwhile use the first favourable opportunity to obtain the dispensation, he little knew that he was assisting the youth to a sedative which he laid on all the starts and prickings of his conscience.

In justice to the English knight, it must, however, be recorded that the result of the meditations of a restless night which followed Cæsar's farewell banquet, in which Lucrezia had undisguisedly distinguished him, was, that on the next day he would hasten among the first to her presence, and endeavour to win a private moment in which to make his request. Inasmuch as Lucrezia's influence was absolute, this was of course a much more advisable plan than applying to the avaricious and slow ministry of the Datary. To assure himself of his resolution, and perhaps for some other vague reason, Le Beaufort communicated his intention to the Orsino, who, however, earnestly pressed him to defer it, for any suspicion which might have crossed his imagination was removed, and his affection restored in full tide, by the young knight's generous demeanour at the tournament. Yet these kind efforts seemed only to strengthen Le Beaufort's contrary determination; until in the glow of friendship and triumph, Paolo entreated him to remain to be present at his nuptials with Donna Lucrezia. Then, under strict injunctions of secrecy, he confided to him a secret compact into which the barons of the confederacy had entered with Cæsar. While he was engaged at Milan in lulling the suspicions of the French, they were to assemble their forces under pretence of attacking Piombino, and restoring it to the dominion of the church, which had long contended with the family Appiano for its possession. Instead of which, on Cæsar's rejoining them, they were suddenly to fall upon Tuscany, and restore the Medici. Thus strengthened, the pontiff would no longer dare to trifle with the Orsini in their demand of his daughter's hand; after obtaining which, Paolo laughingly intimated that Cæsar's projects on Ferrara would wait long for their accomplishment.

Le Beaufort's reflections on this extraordinary glimpse into the involved workings of Italian policy were soon absorbed in others more pleasurable, though certainly not to the Orsino. Fantastic diplomas, richly arabesqued with emblems of the passion, were brought to them, constituting them

doctors in an Academy of Love founded by Donna Lucrezia, for the purpose of converting the Knight of St. John to its pleasurable tenets.

This device was in the scholastic taste of the age, beautified by the warm and poetical imagination of Lucrezia. Of her most favoured female companions and retinue, secure in her own empery, she had culled twenty of those most gifted with beauty and alluring talents, who, with an equal number of men selected for analogous qualities, including the Osino and Sir Reginald, Bembo, Machiavelli, the Cardinal of Medici, and others distinguished for their brilliant wit or poetic genius, composed the academy of which she was herself the president. Its professed object was to convert the recusant Hospitaller to the sweet doctrines of Love, which the Academicians were to unite in explaining and illustrating to him; and for this purpose were to meet every evening, in places designated by the bright president, either in the Vatican, her gardens, or the palaces of the friends to whom she deigned so great an honour, with exception of three days in each week, which, as the indulgence against Lent was now at an end, were to be spent by all in retirement and devotion. The first sessions was ordered to be held in the vineyard of the Vatican, as the fine gardens covering the elevation now occupied by the Belvedere were styled; and not until a week after Cæsar's departure, when the Hospitaller might be supposed to have recovered from the suffering inflicted by his wounds.

This event was impatiently expected by Alfonso: he burned to satisfy himself, by his own observation, of the degree of intelligence which Lucrezia and the English knight had as yet attained, and he was besides tormented with a ravenous desire to see her, for, after all, it was a physical delight to gaze upon her beauty, though with the eye of a forever banished spirit looking through the bars of Eden. He thought they never would—but the day and hour both came at last.

The place of meeting was one which the seneschal of the Decameron would have selected as fit for the reception of his luxurious masters, where every surrounding object was in harmony with the delicious and charmed existence which they had devised in defiance of death. Arcades of vines, matted with the bright green foliage of spring and showered with blossoms, ascended in winding terraces to a height on which they converged as into a star, and formed a spacious canopy over an expanse of the brightest turf, inlaid with a mosaic of flowers, in the centre of which was a fountain which arose to a great height in the clear sky, and kept up a perpetual coolness and refreshing harmony of waters. Between the interstices of the vines, magnificent views of the whole surrounding country and of the city were visible; to which circumstance, perhaps, or to the effect of an infinity of roses which grew among the vines, and the lofty cypresses which made the elevation a conspicuous object in every direction, it owed its designation of the Belvedere.

Alfonso had yet the resolution to make himself among the last to arrive; and then, ascending the first terrace, he found that a precaution was taken which increased his suspicions. All who passed a guard of beautiful children arrayed as cupids, who defended it with their little silver bows, resigned their weapons, and were compelled to pledge their honour that they would use perfect courtesy and harmony with all whom they encountered. The impatient Hospitaller was obliged to promise this too, and hastening on, soon found himself in the midst of the newly founded Academy.

A circular tapestry, richly wrought with a vast design of flowers and fruit, was spread before the fountain, around which, on green velvet cushions, in low chairs of twisted branches, sat the Academicians of Love, twenty judiciously paired on each side of the president's seat, which was raised above the rest on a dais of green turf. And there sat Lucrezia, in all her loveliness, with a diadem wrought of myrtle and roses on her head to distinguish her dignity, the rest wearing only garlands of the same texture. Sir Reginald and the Orsino sat on her right and left, and immediately opposite, on the farther side of the circle, was the places reserved for the recusant whom it was the business of the assembly to convert.

When Alfonso entered, Lucrezia was in laughing discourse with Le Beaufort; and there was something in the unrestrained vivacity of her coquetry, and even in the deep glow of the passion in his looks, which calmed the jealous fears of the prince. But he liked not the rush of colour with which she turned from Sir Reginald to greet him with cold and reserved courtesy, nor the visible anxiety with which, while affecting to command it by some irreconcileable authority, she ordered all present to pledge themselves to uninterrupted harmony and friendliness during the sittings of the Academy. Le Beaufort, with a glance of no slight meaning at Alfonso, declared that he reserved his rights until then; and with an ample return of the look, Alfonso signified his assent. He then took his seat—the only one in the assembly ungarlanded.

And now the beautiful presidentess was unanimously called upon to explain for what purposes she had founded the Academy, and the services she expected from those whom she had distinguished by creating them members of so blissful a court. And it was with scarcely a glance at the pretended object, but with a continual play of smiles and blushes at Sir Reginald, that she delivered a musical harangue in reply. To convert so stern and obstinate a recusant of love as the Knight of Ferrara, she announced to be the difficult and glorious purpose of the foundation; and as love was so delicious and priceless a good, that it was only possible to be despised by those who were ignorant of its value, the Academicians were to devote their meetings to the recital of tales illustrative of its effects and power, whether in good or evil passages of adventure and fate; to singing songs in praise or description of the passion; to answering or freely disputing any doubts which the recusant might devise; each sessions concluding with dances and music and innocent revelries, and aught else capable of inspiring the divine sentiment to which the Hospitaller alone, of all things animate and even inanimate, was a rebel! To avoid the tediousness of ceremonial forms, each was to assume a name derived from some allusion, which might render it pleasing to himself, and by which only he or she was to be known and addressed in the Academy.

Bembo immediately proposed, that as the centre and sun of all their happiness, and of this enchanting device, Lucrezia should be designated simply—Light. Lucrezia instantly turned to Sir Reginald, and inquired if he would be her Girasol, or sun-flower; and on his eager acceptance of this singular title, Alfonso declared that he desired to be called Darkness, since his opinions were held to be the reverse of those entertained by the illustrissima. He scarcely dreamed what harm he had done himself by the involuntary betrayal which the fierce vivacity of his manner conveyed; but a single glance and a woman's quick instinct showed Lucrezia that his rivalry might be stirred.

This preliminary arranged, with much laughter and pleasant guessing,

and raillery at the secrets included in the selected pseudonyms, Lucrezia summoned Bembo to open the proceedings in the manner which he thought best. The canon, who was thoroughly replunged into all his old fascination, smilingly declared it would be proper, in the first place, to agree upon some general definition of what love was, of whose laws they professed themselves to be expounders.

The proposal was universally accepted; and there ensued a dialogue the brilliancy and eloquence of which might entitle it to preservation in these records, but for the too rich and luxurious colouring which the manners of the age and land permitted. Plato himself might have been puzzled at the spiritual subtlety of some of the definitions, and Sappho have blushed at the material glow of others, while the whole company laughed immoderately at the young Northman's blunt but passionate declaration of the feeling which worked in his heart, when he thought he was but following the general example. The Orsino defined love—a desire to be the air around Lucrezia; while Machiavelli, mocking this refinement, announced that, in his opinion, it was a longing to be caught in a net by Vulcan. Alfonso was, of course, supposed to be ignorant of the matter altogether; but Lucrezia's definition struck him as most disconsonant with her character. Love, she said, was a desire of the soul to mingle with another, to escape from a loneliness which else makes the whole universe a solitude. The Cardinal of Medici declared that he had experienced nothing of love but its pains, and therefore could give but such a delineation as a picture might be in which all the lights were left out. Bembo, who had been watching his opportunity for some time, emphatically announced that he was in a somewhat similar condition, inasmuch as he had only tasted three of the delights of love, which were twelve in number.

This arithmetical limitation immediately excited the attention of the ladies, and of Donna Lucrezia, who smilingly commanded him to enumerate them for the enlightenment of others who might be as ignorant as she professed herself to be. The roguish canon pretended at first to excuse himself, and finally, declaring he would rhyme it, that it might have a better chance of being remembered, recited the following lines, which he intended that the audience should regard as an impromptu, but which, from its great resemblance to a poem of Lorenzo de' Medici, was not, perhaps, the inspiration of the moment:—

LOVE'S DELIGHTS.

“ The first delight of love—oh! 'tis to gaze!
 The second, but to touch the loved one's hand;
 The third, with tremulous voice her charms to praise;
 The fourth, to obey her most despised command;
 The fifth, to upbraid her smiles and cruel ways;
 The sixth, to sit beside her, hushed and bland;
 The seventh, to snatch the first kiss—chastely warm;
 The eighth, to clasp her, scolding, to the breast;
 The ninth, to half devour each rosy charm;
 The tenth, to feel with answering ardour pressed,
 The eleventh, to be alone—doors locked on harm;—
 The twelfth—sweet dames! your colours have long guessed!”

In spite of all efforts to restrain themselves, Lucrezia and her ladies could not forbear betraying some consciousness by the sudden laughter which this termination provoked; but she rapidly returned to the topic, and the discussion was renewed with unabated brilliancy until the moon rose in the deep blue twilight. The sweetness and languid splendour of

the hour well suited the converse, and time passed with the rapidity of all things delightful in this mortal life, until a messenger arrived who brought intelligence that the pontiff's supper was served, a meal which, it appeared, Lucrezia always partook with her sire. The whole Academy determined, however, to escort their beautiful president to the palace; and it was accompanied by their festive groups, in full career of gaiety and enjoyment, that, turning into a walk which led to the entrance of the *Tor di Borgia*, Lucrezia suddenly beheld a monk dart out of some bushes, kneel before her, and present a paper folded in the form of a letter.

Lucrezia's vivacity instantly disappeared; and turning pale and trembling she took the letter, broke it hurriedly open, desiring the monk to rise, which, however, he would not, but still knelt with his hands clasped in very earnest supplication.

"I cannot—I must not—I will not!" she said at last, in a wavering and confused voice. "Tell Friar Bruno none lament his imprisonment more than I, but it is impossible. Bid him wait—a few days may bring great changes. Tell him—Alas, alas! 'tis not my pitilessness indeed!—but that he should deem I am doing what I dare not confess to him, and so will not intercede for him!—Signor Orsino, you shall see that I do not aid your ill-wishers! Tell him, Fra Biccoco, that his words offend me, and he must choose himself another intercessor."

At this sentence, which Biccoco was far from expecting, the faithful *confrère* sobbed aloud, mingling entreaties with exclamations against himself for having, with his inadvertent prate, given a handle to his learned master's enemies. But Lucrezia repulsed him with a harshness foreign to her usual manner, and commanding the guard to remove the monk if he did not himself retire, she passed on with a look in which struggled shame and remorse with all her efforts to preserve the haughty and offended tone of her reply.

From all his observations, Alfonso had now no doubt that the Knight of England had supplanted him in the favour of Lucrezia, and that his own misery and his rival's happiness would soon be complete. He even concluded that, however innocently the first sessions of the new Academy had been spent, under her auspices it would rapidly degenerate into licentiousness, and furnish her with the opportunities which fame declared she knew so well how to use.

And yet the pastime seemingly continued the brilliant intellectual revelry in which it commenced, which we might easily prove from the ample records that we find in the chronicle. And sorely are we tempted by the beauty, tenderness, or wit of most of the poems and legends which formed the chief amusement of those refined orgies, in which Lucrezia's part still retains a fragrance which baffles even the musty scent of the antique parchment; the tart wit of Machiavelli preserves its pungency and cynical brilliancy; the canon yet shines with an admirable but something too licentious gaiety; the gloom and love-longing of the Orsino yet inspire a kind of pity, and contrast with the frank and joyous humour of Sir Reginald, or the stately and austere dignity of the Hospitaller. So accurately are the characters and passions of the speakers reflected in the conversations and legends preserved, that it might materially aid our labour to detail them, but that we are hastening to more important events, and must therefore pass over the episode with this allusion to its great and perennial beauty.

Meanwhile, Lucrezia's spell worked powerfully on its intended victim.

Surrounded by all that could kindle the voluptuous passions, the imagination stimulated with glowing poetry and the warm descriptions in which the narrators of those love-legends revelled, continually exposed to the influence of the marvellous beauty of Lucrezia, and the infinite variety of her allurements, the passion which devoured Alfonso hourly increased in strength even with the struggles which he made to withstand it. The Lenten retirements which she had prescribed and religiously observed, heightened the delirium while apparently giving it time for a lucid interval. Absence taught him how necessary she had become to give any charm to his existence, and although the Hospitaller was well informed that she devoted these retirements to penance and ritual observances of the severest kind, which her paleness and languor on returning abundantly attested, he was tortured with fancies that her privacy might be devoted to purposes more consonant with her reported temperament. The rapturous joy of Sir Reginald at every reunion was his only consolation; for after his own experience, he placed no confidence in the espial of Mona Faustina, whom a double bribe might have allured to a double treason.

In proportion as this familiar intercourse revealed to Alfonso the full value of the prize he had lost, the rare union of loveliness with the most brilliant and yet feminine genius, the inexhaustible treasury of tenderness and sweetness in that fairest bosom which ever heaved, his jealousy deepened, and the anguish of his now despised love. For he could not doubt that it was so: her coldness to himself, and encouragement of Le Beaufort, were proofs, even if he had found it possible to forget the attempt which she had made, if not on his life, at least on his honour. To fortify the resolutions which this conviction should have matured, he endeavoured to use his position to obtain some proof against Lucrezia which might rouse an abhorrence in his soul to counteract her magic. But in vain did he urge on himself the excessive fondness of the pontiff, which he displayed in the most unbounded indulgence; the secret conferences; the unlimited influence of Lucrezia over him: her beauty and talents, her aversion to Cæsar, the dangers which apparently thickened around the Borgian power urged reasons for all.

Ah, truly had the ballerina said that where the bright spirit of love comes not, the dark one will! And this began now to reason with him upon the madness of the sacrifice he had made—the supreme bliss which he had relinquished for a phantom—for what else was the scruple to which he had offered up the matchless happiness which once courted his acceptance? In what strange manner had he reversed all ordinary procedure of passion in his sex, and rejected the beauteous paramour because he could not bestow on her the holy and chaste qualities of the wife! What, though the soul must for ever remain isolated, when the unbounded feast of beauty was spread to all the senses! But was it yet too late, the tempter continued? She had loved him once, and still at moments in her glance flashed something of the past. Moreover, another danger became imminent. The Orsino's vehement suit was strengthened by events which seemed likely to compel its success; on political grounds indeed, for Lucrezia's coldness continued at the freezing point. Cæsar, after a stern reception, as was believed, and abrupt dismissal at Milan, had put himself at the head of the ecclesiastical army, as that of the barons was styled, which immediately invaded Tuscany with every prospect of success in their project of restoring the Medici.

Revenge aided the arguments of the passion which was fast gaining the mastery in Alfonso's heart, suggesting that none of her dranghts could be more bitter to the rivals who had injured him so deeply than his success with Lucrezia. These thoughts gradually worked into action. He defended himself less vehemently against the arguments of the Academicians of Love, and his altered manner and gaze speedily came to Lucrezia's cognizance. But those glances which revealed the furnace in his soul, and the glow of the unhallowed flames within, seemed only to disgust and offend Lucrezia—Lucrezia Borgia! The chaste coldness, or haughtiness and disdain, with which she now eyed him heightened the delirium of desire even with its very hopelessness. Severely rallied as he was on the declension of his rigid principles, Alfonso scarcely disguised how fast he was yielding to the arguments of his associates; and, clutching at every straw in his sinking of hope, the thought occurred to him that in announcing his conversion he might find occasion to avow his passion, and with its new glow rekindle her former feeling.

It must be admitted that the Knight of St. John struggled long with these suggestions of his frenzied passions; but at length they triumphed. And yet it is certain that he had formed no definite plan nor object, when on the eve of the next sessions of the Academy, after one of those torturing absences, he requested Mona Faustina to inform her lady its president, that the convertite required only a short interview with her in private, to obtain satisfaction in some remaining doubts, to make his recantation before the assembly in the evening.

Alfonso's hopes, whatever they might be, brightened like the tints of a rainbow when the sun breaks out, on Faustina bringing him a reply that Donna Lucrezia was going on the following noon to her gardens of Egeria, and would give him audience there, before the Academy assembled, which she had ordered to meet in them on that occasion. This was the more remarkable that, ever since the tournament, under pretext of regard for his safety, Alfonso had been kept in a kind of honourable imprisonment in the Vatican, in which the sessions had always hitherto been held.

Almost for the first time since his arrival, Alfonso discarded his usual cumbrous habiliments; and though his garb was still principally of black velvet, the richness of its lace and embroidery displayed his princely person to advantage, and he had even crossed his breast with a silk scarf of Lucrezia's white. Confiding much more in the secrecy of his movements than in the protection of the attendance assigned to him, he left the palace unobserved, and arrived in the Valley of Egeria with a rush of passions and recollections which not only took from him all power but all wish of resistance—a far worse symptom!

Faustina was in waiting, and informed him that Donna Lucrezia had dismissed her ladies to amuse themselves at their pleasure in the gardens, and gather the flowers which she was wreathing into garlands for the evening in a circular temple, made altogether of twisted branches and flowers, which formed the centre of a fantastic labyrinth or maze, called the Minotaur, from an antique statue of the monster which decorated it. Slipping a ring of great value on the old dame's finger, as a testimony, he said, of gratitude for her attentions during his illness, Alfonso hastened on as if he had wings to his feet; and yet his heart beat so thickly when he perceived the rose-matted arches of the temple through the leaves of the maze that he was obliged to pause to recover breath. At the mo-

ment a voice struck upon his ear, but not the voice of Lucrezia; and with a feeling almost of suffocation in the intensity of his agitation, Alfonso clutched aside some foliage to ascertain if his simultaneous suspicion was well founded.

The figure of the Minotaur was cast in brass, and resembled a monstrous bull couched on the marble pavement of the temple; and as it was supposed to have just received the blow of Theseus, the head was to the ground, and the massive neck and shoulders made a seat, of which Lucrezia had availed herself; for there she sat, assiduously twining a heap of flowers into garlands. Close at hand, against the pedestal of one of the pillars, leaned Sir Reginald, with several wreaths on his arm, as if it was the duty of his attendance to carry them, speaking in a low, deep, passionate tone, to which Lucrezia replied with laughing carelessness and gaiety, keeping her eyes on her sylvan labour, and perhaps for that reason unconscious of the depth of the young Englishman's emotion.

The nearest approach which Le Beaufort had as yet won himself to make towards obtaining the object of his journey, was to inform Lucrezia that he had a petition to recommend to her furtherance, whenever she could waste so much time as to listen to it. On this morning he was surprised with a message from her, inviting him to attend her in her gardens before the Academicians assembled, that she might hear his request, and prefer it to the pontiff on her return to the palace. This message was delivered with an injunction to secrecy, which filled the youth with a wild tumult of hopes and fears, which he refused to suffer himself to examine, but resolutely shunning all thought, lest he should raise some obstacle in his own conscience and heart, obeyed.

Alfonso knew not that his approach was known to Lucrezia by a secret signal; but nearly at the instant when he came within earshot, the lady interrupted Le Beaufort's discourse. "Enough, signor," she said, "I am content on your knightly word to believe myself as fair as the sea-foam, if that will content you; but now let me hear that prayer you have to make, for we have good news from Milan, and his paternity is in a granting mood to-day."

Le Beaufort was silent for several moments; and then with a strong effort which escaped not observation, he replied by brokeuly preferring his request for a dispensation to wed his cousin, formerly betrothed to his brother.

"You love an English girl, then,—and would leave me for ever?" said Lucrezia, with a lightning glance which shivered through the whole frame of Le Beaufort.

"I love, I love," he replied, turning pale and faltering—"I love—no, I adore, I worship thee! thee only! thee always, perfect Lucrezia! Away with every respect! let them slay me if they will by every death my falsehood deserves, but let it be here, at thy feet!" And he threw himself in an ecstasy of passion on his knees before her.

"You are in good place to let me try this wreath on, which I intend for your wear to-night," said Lucrezia with laughing carelessness, as if this were accustomed language, and playfully bending over him and putting on the garland. It is probable that she intended to exhibit her favour to the knight in a marked manner, but she miscalculated the force of the feeling which had thus overthrown every other in his breast—until she found herself encircled by the arms of Le Beaufort. Crimsoning with anger and shame, she instantly started up, repulsing him with a

vivacity or rather fierceness which, combined with the uncertainty and mingled nature of his own emotions, instantly released her, she stepped from him, and exclaimed—"Is this thy faith to thy friend, and respect to the daughter of Alexander?—But yet," she added, with one of her sweet laughs, turning to the discomfited lover, and hearing Alfonso stir in his covert—"But yet—it is no sin to love as I know thy loyal nature but intends, with all thy soul!—so we will take it as a carnival jest, out of season, and punish thee thus!" And she was throwing the flowers which she held in her hands at the confused and shame-struck knight when Alfonso entered on the scene.

Not ill-content to find that Sir Reginald's progress was so limited, and so suddenly checked, Alfonso saluted the lady with a warmth of manner that brought the haughty stain to her brow which Le Beaufort's audacity had not. And when, after stiff greetings exchanged with his rival, he reminded the lady that he had humbly requested a private audience, that he might the more freely confide his doubts for solution, she replied with marked coldness, "I feared your questions, knight, might be too difficult for an unlearned damsel to solve, and therefore I have called in, and must retain, the assistance of this wise young doctor of the Academy, who has already taught me many things I knew not, say men what they will of my science in love!"

Glooming as darkly as Le Beaufort brightened, Alfonso yet made an effort. "Firstly, lady," he said, with a glance which perchance was not so much without its effect as he imagined, "I would know, whether if ours once truly win the love of that sex which you make celestial by being of it—whether indeed real love in woman can ever so totally fade as to leave not a trace behind?"

"For *real* love, I know not, signor,—none than you know better I am incapable of it; but if a new and brighter picture be painted over a rude and chaotic sketch, the pity were that any should remain," replied Lucrezia, with so visible a coldness and disdain that Alfonso was irritated to the highest degree.

"Then I relapse into all mine ancient heresies," he said, with acrimony. "I was ever averse to mingle with the herd; but to be loved as one of many—since that is woman's love—nothing allures, but rather forces my soul back to its calm!"

"The thought strikes us shiver despite the sun!—Le Beaufort, approach, or we shall become an icicle!" said Lucrezia, disdainfully, and turning to the eager knight of England.

"I will take away the winter from your presence, lady, that Sir Reginald's warmth may not heat me too!" said Alfonso, bitterly; and he retired so suddenly that Lucrezia had no time to bid him stay, even had she been inclined; and not content with this departure, after a short solitary ruminations, he left the valley, leaving some vague apology with Mona Faustina.

In this mood of indignation and despair, he sought out Bembo, and communicated what he had observed, with a sharp commentary that since the lovers had reached a mutual understanding, he desired not to witness the progress of Sir Reginald's treason, lest his indignation should find vent. He therefore ordered Bembo to excuse him from the meetings of the Academy and all other pleasurable society during the remainder of Lent, which his conscience upbraided with having hitherto not sufficiently observed for the member of a religious order.

Bembo declared that no one could count himself safe from such a woman, and obeyed with great alacrity; and at night Alfonso received the agreeable intelligence that his absence had in nowise disturbed the hilarity of the company, and that on the contrary Lucrezia never seemed more gay and satisfied. He persisted with admirable sullenness in his resolution, and secluded himself almost continually in his apartment, as if absorbed in devotion; while the court only increased in the number and brilliancy of its festivals, and Bembo's own discontent and carpings at the favour now undisguisedly exhibited by Lucrezia to Sir Reginald, after his avowal, continually fed Alfonso's worst imaginings. At the same time he felt that all his motions were attentively watched, and he began to fear that he must almost regard himself as much a prisoner as a guest in the Vatican. Cæsar's return, which was to release the knights of the tourney, was meanwhile protracted; and the success of the Orsini in Tuscany seemed likely soon to enable them to dictate in Rome. Paolo's patience might in great measure be ascribed to this hope; when suddenly the scene changed.

The barons, by their ravages, had excited the undying hatred of the Florentines, and were hastening unresistedly on to besiege the capital—when the potent orders of the King of France arrested their career. The French army was now ready to march to the invasion of Naples; and Cæsar announced with an effect as great as that of a peal of thunder from a bright sky, that he must obey the king, who had restored him to his favour, and that the pope had agreed to send the ecclesiastical army with that of France on its invasion. Meanwhile he was commanded to withdraw from Tuscany, and proceed to the recovery of Piombino, until it was necessary to join the advance of the French.

The barons found themselves totally outwitted, and that they had no resource but to endeavour to bid with the Borgias for the favour of France. But even with their unwilling agency, Cæsar's conquests were so rapid and great that they infused equal astonishment and terror; and the advance of the French army became a source of congratulation to the barons themselves as putting a stop for a time to the torrent of his triumphs.

Still the masterpiece of perfidy in the compact with the Spaniards was undreamed until the arrival of the French generals with an army which seemed at first very inadequate to the enterprise which they had in hand; when after the celebration of a grand mass, in the presence of the pontiff, that ancient holy alliance was proclaimed by which Naples was divided between the French and Spaniards.

Glossed with some fair pretexts, and with accusations against the unfortunate Frederic, still the most unscrupulous politicians stared aghast at so palpable a breach of every principle of good faith in all the parties contracting. Some indeed could find apologies for the pontiff in the rebellious conduct of the King of Naples, his vassal, his open protection of the Roman malcontents against their suzerain, and above all of the poets whose verses infected the ear of Europe and of posterity with reports so foul. The declared hostility of the French might somewhat justify their use of the means of vengeance thus offered; but the most reckless could devise no excuse for the perfidy of the Spaniards, the pretended allies and defenders of the monarch devoted.

The Orsini, and above all Paolo, felt that they had been playing at a game in which they were fairly beaten: and the undisguised triumph of

the Borgias bitterly increased their mortification. But they were obliged to dissemble both their fears and chagrin, and they mustered in great numbers to attend the great banquet given by the pontiff to welcome the French generals, and to which Cæsar himself sent invitations to Sir Reginald and the Hospitaller, with information that, having consulted with the French chivalry, he intended to deliver his judgment on the tournament.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“Come to me, ravens! I will give ye food.”—Gaelic War Song.

Reports of the luxury and magnificence of the pontifical court had prepared the French leaders for a grand display, but all were amazed when, entering the immense hall of the Tor di Borgia, they beheld a spectacle which, lighted by the meridian sun of Italy, realized the most gorgeous legends of Assyrian magnificence. The lofty roofs glistering with gold, the walls hung with miracles of the restored arts of design, wrought in tapestry and velvet, extended as far as the eye could follow, terminating in a portico which descended by a succession of terraces into the Eden-like gardens of the palace, whose very foliage glistened like green silver in the bright atmosphere. The long vista was crowded with attendants in rich costumes, pages, and men-at-arms, to serve the banquet to the innumerable guests, for the pontiff had invited all but the common soldiery of the French army. About its centre the hall formed a circular saloon, over which was a dome richly frosted with silver, and supported on pillars of white marble, with Corinthian capitals similarly chased. This was the chief place of the banquet, the pontiff sitting enthroned under a canopy which was elevated on a platform.

Lucrezia and her ladies, the commanders of the French army, and other principal guests were seated here, and the mingling of ecclesiastical costumes with those of women and laymen was not more incongruous than that of the devices of their ranks. The triple crosses of archbishops, and crosiers of bishops, mingled in the air with spears and flaming axes and the wands of heralds, for behind each chair stood either an ecclesiastic in his stiff gold-embroidered stole, or still more gorgeous herald, or plumed page, in attendance on lady or knight or priest. Statues, rescued from the ruins of art when art was divine, filled all the niches with the silent glory of their beauty. The polished marble floor reflected as if in oil the richly chased silver vases placed at intervals around the saloon, exhaling delicious odours from flowers whose profusion marked the influence of female taste. The tables were covered with gold damask, and blazed with jewelled vessels whose materials were the least part of their value. Magic could present no richer blaze of colour than the garbs of the guests, lit by the torrent of lustre which descended from the open dome above. The violet mantles, scarlet robes, and ermine caps of the cardinals, the gold wrought habits of the bishops, the gaudy military magnificence of the French, the delicate splendour of the female costumes, the changing glow and rich confusion of the attire of the attendants, produced an ever shifting variety of glories like the rapid tints of air-bubbles in the sun.

The reports of his spies had of late much confused the calculations of Cæsar, and it was not without a pang of doubt that his eye fell on the English knight, whose grandiose person, blooming countenance, and superb habiliments attracted general notice, and a degree of envy and curiosity when it was observed with what beaming smiles Lucrezia distinguished him. Cæsar's brows, seldom betrayers of his thoughts, loured darkly when he noted the indifference with which she turned from the Hospitaller, and the deep gloom of the latter. He strove to stifle this uneasy feeling by launching into an excessive panegyric of Sir Reginald as he presented him to the French commanders, insomuch that the French were piqued at the lavish praises heaped on a stranger, and of a rival nation.

The banquet, however, proceeded with the usual pompous ceremonial. The enthusiasm which Lucrezia's beauty excited among the French chivalry was unbounded; and it blazed with unusual glory, for, too well aware of her dark reputation, she laboured to give it the lie by the contrast of brilliant gaiety and wit—unwont accompaniments of the dark and festering thoughts engendered by great crimes. Once or twice indeed Alfonso saw, by the secret swell of her beautiful bosom, that she sighed even when laughingly receiving the adulation of her new adorers, but the sigh appeared to him that of voluptuous tenderness, understood by Le Beaufort. The sweet breath of the perfumes, the murmurs of the low toned music which accompanied without interrupting the conversation, the lustre of her loveliness, irritated this jealous thought by heightening the glow of passion. The light laughter which arose among the guests seemed in mockery of his anguish; every exaggerated compliment to the sovereign beauty struck him as insulting denials addressed obliquely to himself.

The scene at length became too irksome even for Cæsar's dissimulation, and he said with singular abruptness—“But we miss a rare jest! tell me, fair sister and beauteous dames, what success had ye in warming the ice in your prisoner's breast? for ye are to understand, French gentlemen, this religious knight is a despiser of all ladies and gentlewomen, and boasts himself impregnable to their fiercest attacks.”

“If, knight, thou hast not yielded thee at mercy, without hope of rescue or ransom, to the unmatched beauty of yonder lady, call thyself none; for, by my father's beard! the angels from heaven might descend unblamed from heaven to worship it!” said the old commander, Louis de la Tremouille.

“Nay, we have found the ice so hard, that albeit we have all shone on it incessantly, it grew but the more fixed,” said Lucrezia, with a momentary paleness.

“Hear then my judgment, solemnly debated in the presence of the Lord Louis of France, and of his noblest peers,” said Cæsar, suddenly. “Inasmuch as all who beheld the tourney acquit the Lord Orsino and Le Beaufort of aught but misfortune in the misadventure of their competitor, and their merits and glories were adjudged equal; we declare that the prize can only be lovingly determined in actual feats of war and hardihood; and that therefore he of the three who shall, in the decision of a quest of ladies, bravest demean him in effecting this conquest of Naples which we march on, shall win the wreath of triumph. Thus may we learn if women's idols are the realities, or but the glittering shows of the strength and valour which, forsooth, they find in those who have enough of either

to master themselves. Tell me, ladies, knights, and peers, say I well?"

A general burst of applause from all but the Hospitaller replied; even the martial spirit of Alexander took fire, and with a loud voice he pronounced his approval. Sir Reginald turned with a quivering and impassioned look to Lucrezia, who visibly whitened. But she felt that Cæsar's eye was fixed intently upon her, and she said, in a low tone, "The Knight of St. John deems the quarrel not worth pursuing; and therefore I trust we damsels need not hazard our champion in so rude a wager."

Alfonso was in truth altogether taken by surprise, and although, as the fast ally of France, he felt that to serve under her banner thus privately was a politic compliment, it was this concern for Le Beaufort's safety which determined him.

"I accept the challenge, signor," he said; "the rather that chance may spare my sword an else necessary chastisement, whose edge old recollections blunt."

Le Beaufort's eyes sparkled, and he was about to give a vehement reply, when Lucrezia, to the general surprise, laid her hand on his arm, and restrained him by the gesture, like a blood-steed that obeys the finest check.

"Peace, peace, I pray you all!" she said, with a singularly fierce and sudden glance at Cæsar. "Against the noblest chivalry of the world would I freely stake a good cause on the sword of the Knight of England; and therefore marvel not that I esteem him as ever our cowardly sex hath honoured valour. But for all of you I do profess this love that none shall incur aught of evil which I will not lament—and if it may be—*avenge* to the uttermost!"

This strange phrase had little time to be commented on, for Ives d'Allegre, commander of the Gascons, pettishly exclaimed, "You speak, noble lady, as an the knight were as hard to cope withal as St. George himself, or Sir Achilles of Greece! I match myself with no such men of proof, yet, by death and life! the best knight of England may find among us one to take the vaunt out of him."

"So far as the worst may serve your turns, my lord, I am here!" said Le Beaufort, firing. "I trust I have not altogether forgotten my grandsire's lesson, when he told my by what means he came to be present at the coronation of our English baby, Harry the Sixth, in Paris."

"Fairly answered, gosling of Mars!" said La Tremouille, laughing good-humouredly. "Note ye this boast, gentlemen of France; and if the smiles of your ladies cannot win you to snatch the glory from this sharp-tongued Englishman, let the remembrance of his vaunt!"

And thus was this singular contest protracted, which began to attract a general attention in the chivalrous courts of Europe. And it seemed to be hastening to a solution. The French army tarried only a few days on its march, and the Romans had still another grand spectacle in witnessing the departure of the array, which the whole pontifical court also beheld from the ramparts of Santangelo. The French forces, without the Spanish treachery, even flushed as they were with the recent conquest of Milan, and the recollection of the easy conquests of Charles VIII., must have been considered very inadequate to their object. But their twelve thousand were principally composed of the flower of the valiant chivalry of France, and of Swiss infantry whose discipline and experience rendered them almost irresistible in the field, and the Roman barons composed about five thousand more. It was a noble and stirring pomp to behold

the long lines of pikemen, arquebusiers, archers, cannon, and glittering cavalry, with their blue standards sown with golden lilies, innumerable pennons, forests of spears and lances, above all of which towered the lofty pikes of the Swiss, passing over the bridge of Santangelo; while the court and ladies on the ramparts waved farewell, the pontiff stretched his benediction, the populace shouted, and the cannon roared in deafening concert with the clangor of trumpets and drums.

Unheeding that, for almost the first time, Paolo's eyes dwelt upon him with suspicion, Sir Reginald appeared with the torn scarf preciously worn round his neck, which Alfonso had formerly rejected. Those who watched closely thought that Lucrezia kissed her hand specially at the young English knight; and Bembo himself observed, that as the last standard disappeared, a rush of tears came to her eyes.

“Who is it hath won the glory of this sorrow, gentlest lady?” said the canon, speaking in a tone of tenderness which he had never until now ventured to assume.

“‘Tis not in my nature, all men know, to smile for one—therefore, nor weep,” replied Lucrezia, with strained vivacity. “It but saddened me to think how few of all that multitude shall return to glad their mothers’ and their loved-ones’ longing eyes!”

The walls of Rome were soon left behind the advancing host, and the Campagna extended its funeral solitudes around them. Ruins and scattered tombs, the everlasting arches of the aqueducts, wastes of long grass, covered the whole extent of view even to the sea on one hand, and on the other to the low purple lines of distant mountains.

To the more penetrating the policy of the Borgias began to give some significant indications. Cæsar suddenly published a decree by which the whole estates of the Colonnas were forfeited, and stimulated the Orsini to renew the former bitter animos ties, by ravaging their estates on the march, and seizing all either for the pontiff or themselves. And the matter became still more perceptible in the operations which Alexander commenced immediately the forces of the confederacy were out of sight, in crushing divers of the inferior barons, and in obtaining possession of their strongholds, under various pretexts.

Bestowing no thought on the magnificent beauty of the country they traversed, the invaders plunged into the Tartarean wastes of the Pontine Marshes. Not then, as now they are drained, a pestilential Eden of fruitfulness, but an immense morass bounded in some directions by funereal forests and wide sea-wastes, in others by mountains on whose remote crags castles and cities gleamed incessantly into view. The hot and sulphureous air hung over them like a canopy, and a vague sentiment of doubt and awe fell on the boldest spirits, as if in reality they were traversing the magic land of Circe. The soldiery, imbued with the legends of popular credulity, and struck with the loveliness and desolation of the oases which sometimes arose like magic islands of verdure and bloom amidst the wide desert, imagined they were the haunts of fairies, who had thus richly adorned them to tempt the unwary traveller.

The glory for which the rivals were to struggle seemed, however, to fly before them. The unfortunate King of Naples, bewildered by the multitude of his enemies, had resolved to confine his efforts to the defence of his fortified cities. The nearest of these was Capua; and Cæsar now publicly declared that, by means of a secret intelligence which he possessed in the town, he would procure its surrender the instant he appeared

before the gates. It was known to be garrisoned chiefly by German mercenaries, without any commander of name, and crowded with panic-stricken fugitives; and the French commanders gave implicit faith to the assurances of their subtle ally, although he refused to reveal on what he founded his expectations.

The army advanced without the least sign of resistance, and descending the mountains which overlook the plain of the Volturro, Capua appeared, nestling amidst its towers and battlements at the base of its lofty hills. Around it bloomed the paradise of Italy—the Felix Campania—that ever, like a beautiful and lascivious coquette, displays her profusion of charms to every comer, welcoming all alike to an undistinguishing embrace. Vineyards clustered along every steep; groves of oranges, citrons, and pomegranates, perfumed the air; the glossy green of the pastures was so thickly strewn with flowers that they seemed like waste gardens tended only by the genii of the air, while in the vast concave of sky the cone of Vesuvius was plainly visible, and the rainbow-tinted waves of the Mediterranean.

Agreeably to his declarations, Cæsar and the Italians headed the approach to the city, to obtain its surrender rather than with intent to comply with the custom of war in summoning a city before beleaguering it. Accompanied by a large retinue of the chief commanders, among whom were the three competitors, who beheld the peaceful surrender of the city with dissatisfaction, Cæsar advanced, preceded by a herald in white. The road was skirted on both sides by woods of orange and lime trees in full blossom, which opened at last into the rich meadows and gardens immediately surrounding the walls. Violets and jessamine bloomed even in the ditches beneath the bulwarks, and all looked so tranquil and unwarlike that it was a kind of surprise to behold the walls crowded with armed men, petards and culverins leveled, and men-at-arms standing beside them with flaming matchlocks. But the surprise was still greater, when in answer to the herald's summons, an armed chieftain appeared over the gateway, who shouted, “Truee! let us hear my lord, the Duke of Romagna!” in the well-known voice of Fabrizio Colonna.

It was generally reported that the Colonnas were retreating with the army of King Frederic on Naples, and the presence of the redoubtable Fabrizio augured the failure of Cæsar's project. But without any outward sign of dismay he rode somewhat in advance of his companions, who halted, and summoned the city to surrender to its lawful suzerain, the pope.

“I marvel not at your demand, most courteous and gentle assassin, poisoner, fratricide, tyrant, and oppressor! since you deem you speak to your traitor, Philip Maas, and not to Fabrizio Colonna, who is in Capua, to hold it for his lord the King of Naples, against all the world, our holy father the pope, and the devil to boot!” shouted the Colonna. “Therefore, illustrious Borgia, I must needs deny you lodging, but refreshments not, for here are these melons to appease the thirst of your hot ride to Capua!”

And so saying, the commander beckoned to some soldiers, who advanced with a large wicker basket, which they heaved over the walls to the feet of Cæsar's horse, where it opened, and six gory heads rolled out.

Even Cæsar slightly paled at the ghastly spectacle, and quieting his steed with difficulty, he gazed anxiously over those gory visages with their glassy eyes and clotted hair.

"Are they not all there, or dost thou seek for thy paramour's beardless cheeks among them, to kiss?" said Fabrizio, laughing bitterly. "Bide a few hours, and I will send her to thy tent from one of these petards, thanking thee very heartily, that by setting her on this last black treason, thou hast given me a pretence to wash out the stain from the name of Colonna in her degenerate blood!"

"Even as thou wilt: thou sendest her at least to the Turks' paradise, and Sultan Zem will be at the gates to welcome her!" retorted Cæsar. "Even as thou wilt. The world shall know by the little moan I make how false are thy accusations."

"Dog! when she threatens me with thy vengeance—and thine alone, as her most doting paramour—if I tear her from the sanctuary! which by all the saints I will, if the baldpates yield her not ere sunset!" shouted the Colonna.

"Thus then will I refute thee," returned Cæsar. "The sanctuary is in the cathedral, and the cathedral in the heart of this Capua, which I devote to the rudest wrath of the soldier, swearing I will never listen to any terms for its redemption! And as the lieutenant of the church, I withdraw all right or privilege of sanctuary from any church or chapelry in its walls, curse, ban, and excommunicate the whole city, and all holding it against our lord the pope! And, therefore, go now and do thy worst against the traitress and pagan harlot, thy kinswoman, of whom you accuse me that Italy may believe your lie of the death of Sultan Zem."

"Thou hast till this matchlock half wastes itself, and then our ordnance clears the air of thy pestilent presence!" returned Fabrizio, snatching a string of flaming tow from one of the soldiers. Laughing scornfully and shaking his clenched hand in defiance, Cæsar yet felt the necessity of retreat, and rode slowly back to his company.

"The tow is spent—discharge culverins!" thundered the Colonna, yielding to a fury which overcame every other consideration, and throwing it impatiently over the ramparts. All the summoners hastily retired, excepting Sir Reginald. "One stroke for merry England!" he exclaimed, and spurring his warhorse into a gallop, he threw his spear like a gleam of lightning at the lofty battlements, and for some moments only the flash of his sword, and his cheering shout, gave assurance that he survived amidst the whirlwind of smoke and fire around him. The emulation of the chivalry burst forth at the sight, and without waiting for counsel or command, an instant assault was resolved upon. The army came rolling on in waves, the Swiss alone preserving their exact discipline, while the besieged poured a destructive storm of shot and arrows from every point of their lofty bulwarks, which were nearly doubled in height by the great depth of the ditches.

These obstacles were, however, overlooked in the first enthusiasm of the assault; some rushed at once headlong on their steeds into the ditches; others procured ladders and battering engines, and tumultuously endeavoured to scale the walls; and it was not until many had perished in the water, or fell transfixated with arrows, or crushed beneath huge stones, thrown with prodigious force from the walls, that the more sober began to misdoubt the success of the enterprise. But the French ordnance began now to thunder in reply to that of the enemy; and the clouds of smoke furnished some shelter under which the assailants advanced with their engines to a renewed attack. Rafts were hastily contrived to cross the ditch, and a crowd of the most courageous knights were waiting the

completion of one to attempt the passage on foot, when general attention was excited by the appearance of a vast and ponderous machine, dragged by Cæsar's guard, under his own guidance. It was formed of four lofty timbers, moving on massive wheels, crossed with bars so as to make four steep ladders to the top, on which was a little tower with a drawbridge hung by chains, and ready to be lowered.

Even the defenders of the city paused and gazed in alarm and astonishment at this new and portentous engine, which was halted by command of the duke out of the range of their artillery. The knights rushed around him in eager companies to ascertain the purpose of the contrivance.

" Niccolò of Florence invented it," replied Cæsar, laughing at their eagerness. " 'Tis meant for cities like this, of lofty walls and broad ditches: but it needs perchance better men than we have among us to use it. Who will follow the three tourneyers—for I doubt not their readiness—into the castle above, whence to lower the drawbridge on the walls, and make us way to follow as fast as we can scramble up at their valorous tails?"

The boldest were silent at this proffer, until Sir Reginald, vaulting from his horse, and placing his foot on the first step of the ladder, shouted, " We of England have it!" and began to mount with great agility, despite the weight of his armour. The Orsino was instantly abreast with him, and Alfonso, amidst a general rush of the young French chivalry, managed to be the third.

In a few moments the castle was filled, and the ladders hung thick with eager combatants; and attended by a great throng of those who desired to share the glory, the machine was hurled along with such enthusiasm, and the ground descending rapidly, gave it so fearful an impetus, that it was impossible to hinder it from toppling over into the ditch. It fell with a tremendous crash forward against the walls, and in such a manner that the castle lay almost sidewise on the summit. Cæsar uttered a cry, which like the hyena's partook in some strange manner of laughter; but perhaps more fortunately for the adventurous assailants than he had intended, so great was the consternation of the besieged, that they gazed without stirring at the formidable engine, and in that moment's pause the knights broke their way out of their wooden prison, and with cries of victory rushed to the attack of the bulwarks of a gateway before them, at which they hoped to admit their friends.

The conflict was now renewed on all sides, amidst deafening uproar, ordnance, shouts, groans, and trumpet-blasts, making up one hideous noise. Cæsar had at least the military virtues, and he was observed amidst all the destruction and tumult around reanimating his soldiery, and assisting with his own hands in making a kind of bridge with ladders and planks to the catapult in the ditch, that they might mount to the assistance of the victorious assailants above. The latter seemed indeed as if they scarcely needed any; the defenders of the wall were driven with terrific violence into a tower which crossed it, and defended the gateway below. But Fabrizio Colonna had now rushed to the point of attack, and displayed all the courage and skill of an able commander. Some of his soldiers were observed engaged in lowering a massive bartizan over the entrance of the tower, which Fabrizio obstinately defended against all the assaults of the half-frenzied victors, who clashed against one another in their furious attempts to be the first that forced a way into it. The Hospitaller and the Orsino suddenly met in a rude shock which threw them both

aside, and allowed Sir Reginald to dash between them to the assault. Armed only with a broken sword, and unconscious in the absorption of the conflict that it was so, the valiant knight rushed on; and although nearly all his mantle and surcoat was torn away by the spears which pierced them, he forced his way into the tower! But simultaneously a phalanx of pikemen, rushing from the opposite tower, came full flood upon the assailants behind, the chains of the bartizan were cut, and it fell with a deafening clash over the entrance, crushing the Hospitaller's axe from his hand, and narrowly missing his skull.

Le Beaufort remained among the crowd of his infuriate enemies within, and his friends without were now compelled to turn to defend themselves against the new assault. But while arraying their ranks in confusion against the spearmen, the battlements of the tower above were crowded with the besieged, a bright blaze arose, and suddenly a torrent of flaming pitch rushed down on the devoted heads of the assailants. Bathed in liquid flame a part of the combatants rushed distractedly forward, and many were hurled from the ramparts into the ditch, where they were suffocated by the weight of their own armour, without resistance. But the main chivalry rallied, and met the shock of the Capuan spearmen with undaunted courage; and a terrific pell-mell conflict followed on the ramparts, which the multitudes below could do little more than accompany with deafening shouts and uproar.

In the midst of all this horror and confusion, the crown was put upon the terrors of the scene, and all hope of assistance cut off apparently from the assailants. The ditch around their machine suddenly blazed forth like a raging torrent of fire, and its waters covered rapidly with flames, as if impregnated with turpentine, sulphur, and other inflammable materials. The cry arose that the whole circuit of the walls was similarly prepared, and in universal panic the soldiery fled out of the ditches, abandoning all their engines, ladders, and weapons. The assailants on the walls, hearing the cries and trumpetts of recall, beholding their desertion, and pushed by powerful masses of the besieged, abandoned all hope but that of effecting their escape; and although Cæsar's machine was on fire in the ditch below, the knights leaped upon it, clustering on the timbers like shipwrecked sailors to a mast.

The fiery gulf below, however, offered no temptation to those who were lowest to descend farther; and Don Miguel, who rode near the Duke, exclaimed in an undertone full of exultation, "They are all three secure, and Madonna Lucrezia can only blame herself!"

"Hist, Miguel! who is it lends his hand to draw the Hospitaller over in safety? Look, it averts all the strokes of men's swords!" exclaimed Cæsar, so suddenly and violently that the castellan was much alarmed; and his fears increased when he saw that the duke stared with his eyes expanded to double their usual size.

"I see one—Fabrizio Colonna, my lord!" said Migueloto.

"Fool! dost thou think mine eyes play me false? I note him well enough with his column-crest!" returned Cæsar vehemently. "The Dark One!—and now he raises the castle!—nought of earthly strength might do it!"

"My lord! there are some score of them raising the timbers to hurl it over; they know not that it falls on its carriage either way," said the castellan; and, in truth, rending the skies with their shouts of victory, the defenders made one vast heave, and threw the ponderous machine

over, anticipating the instant destruction of all upon it. For a moment the mighty timbers quivered in the air equally poisoned and upright—a terrific pause for all upon it—and fell backward with such violence that nearly all upon it were thrown off, and several were crushed into horrid masses of blood and steel.

All farther exertions were confined to rescuing the soldiery from the flaming ditch, restoring order, and keeping up a continual canouade to prevent a sally from the besieged. It was found impossible to extricate Cæsar's machine, which was now in a general blaze; but although a number of the soldiery were burned and maimed, the principal loss was found to have been sustained by the knights, among them in Sir Reginald le Beau-fort. His fate was not, indeed, known with certainty, but there seemed little reason to doubt it, surrounded as his friends had last seen him by the weapons of furious enemies. With all his bitter reasons of dislike, Alfonso felt the warmth of his old friendship return in the deep regret with which he remembered the brilliant qualities of the young knight, coupled with his woful catastrophe. And yet this generous feeling was strongly chequered when, amidst the incoherent ravings of old Bampton, he heard him mutter against a woman whose treacherous lures had led his young master to his doom. But the Orsino's rage and sorrow amply shared those of the faithful attendant, and it was principally by his assurances of vengeance on the slayers that the old man's thoughts were turned from absolute despair.

No certainty could be obtained, for Fabrizio suffered no one to approach his walls under any pretext, effectually precluding any advantage which the besiegers might hope from the fears and mutinous spirit of the inhabitants and fugitives. During the week which was consumed in completely investing the city, the only sign of shaken resolution was, that no sallies were made to interrupt, which, in so enterprizing a commander, showed either a diffidence of his troops, or of those whom he must leave behind.

At length the investment was completed, and night and day the city was battered with the French artillery, in the use of which they were already better skilled than any other nation of Europe. It was soon remarked that the town gave but a faint reply: several breaches were made, and none of the usual attempts were observed to repair the damage. But having experienced the courage of the defenders, the besiegers continued to widen their breaches, unwilling to renew the attack until they could make it in force. On one occasion, however, all were amazed to behold the walls, as it were, completely deserted. But apprehending some stratagem, and unprepared with means to cross the ditch, which they were labouring to drain by cutting a channel to the Volturno, the French commanders suffered no attempt to be made. On the evening of that day, Fabrizio Colonna made his appearance on the bastion which had been so obstinately assailed and defended, with a white scarf twisted round his truncheon. Observing the Knight of St. John, buried in gloomy thought, surveying the operations of the siege from his motionless charger, he beckoned specially to him, and in a broken voice intimated his desire that messengers should be sent to him to treat of a surrender.

Alfonso felt in his own warlike breast the anguish which wrung that of the Colonna on the words: and he replied with a courtesy and feeling which evidently struck Fabrizio, for he desired him to inform the French commanders that it would give him much satisfaction if he himself should be

sent to treat of the terms of the surrender. It was with a singular and violent concussion of passions that, after this encouragement, Alfonso begged as a special favour, that he would inform him of the fate of the English knight.

"Bid Caesar send for his body, if it would content his brotherly tenderness to send it to Lucrezia for interment in that flowery sepulchre which has received so many!" returned the chieftain, with a grim smile, and the words raised emotions so tumultuous in Alfonso's breast, that he did not venture to trust his voice with any reply.

The tidings of the surrender gave general satisfaction, the French being exceedingly desirous to hasten on, stimulated by fears lest the Spaniards, whose conquests were very rapid, should reach the capital before them. The wisdom of the Knight of St. John had been equally experienced with his valour throughout the siege; and moreover, Cæsar added his special request to Fabrizio's to confer the office of negotiator on him; and, with a kindness for which few gave him credit, he entreated the Hospitaller to procure the delivery of the body of Sir Reginald, that himself and the Orsino might render due honour to the valiant dead by interring it with military pomp, for which purpose they would accompany him to the gates with a bier, and a fitting funeral procession of those knights and chieftains who desired to pay a last respect to his noble dust. There was something in this intimation which vaguely troubled Alfonso, but it was not easy to make any objection, and finally a herald was despatched to the city with intelligence that the envoy was ready to wait upon its commanders. Fabrizio returned word that he would expect him on the following morning, and besiegers and besieged, by tacit agreement, desisted from their mutual annoyances.

The morning of the fatal day dawned over Capua with a sky of that pale lucid purple which gives so exquisite a tint to the landscapes of the south of Italy. While his attendants armed him, Alfonso stood at the entrance of his tent, and inhaled the fragrant freshness of the morning flowing over those flowery champaigns, which seemed to thank him with living and intelligent smiles for his purpose of preserving them from farther ravage.

The whole camp was early in motion, but it was only by the generals that Alfonso's mission was favourably regarded. The fierce and brutal soldiery were enraged at being deprived of the bloody triumph and rewards they had promised themselves in the sack of the rich and crowded city; and perhaps their zeal to render honours to the corpse of the valiant English knight was quickened by an idea that, if he had lived, his impetuous courage would have won the city in a manner more to their liking. When the Hospitaller set forward on his mission he was followed at a short distance by a very gloomy procession, principally of retainers of the Borgia and Orsini, their banners hung with black velvet, trailing their spears reversed in the dust. The barefooted monks of a neighbouring monastery came with them, chaunting lugubrious psalms, with lighted tapers in their hands, which burned whitely in the glare of the sun. Then followed two heralds, with black crape over their gaudy surcoats, and William of Bampton leading his young master's warhorse, housed and plumed with black velvet, and in the pride of its gait contrasting strongly with the sullen gloom of the ancient squire. After the steed and his guide came the bier, formed by two young birch trees, matted together with cypress, and borne by the English archers, hanging their heads in grief, or raising them to glower with fierce and revengeful eyes at the city in which their lord had perished. Cæsar obtained that the whole array should be under arms to receive

the corpse; and as the attention of the besieged was excited by the universal movement in the camp, it was not until this circumstance was explained, that Alfonso, attended by a single squire, was admitted into the city.

A drawbridge was lowered to allow the entrance of the Hospitaller, and when he had passed through the gate, by every observance of war, it ought to have been raised after him. The monks themselves paused, but Cæsar pushed so rapidly forward with the bier-carriers, that he established himself upon it; and the huge German who commanded at the gate made no remonstrance. Meanwhile, Alfonso rode slowly up a street leading to the castle of Capua, and the acclamations of the people, and downcast looks of the soldiery on his way, might have convinced a less observant politician of the state of affairs in the beleaguered city.

He found the Colonna in a chamber of the castle, which overlooked the great square of Capua, and a part of the walls. He was seated in a projecting window, busied apparently in watching some operation either on the walls, or in the square below. So much was he engaged in this survey that the messenger was twice announced ere he seemed to take any notice, and the latter had time to observe what so forcibly drew his attention. Nearly opposite to this window arose the towers of the cathedral, the massive gates of which were closed, and the whole intermediate square was filled with a vast and silent multitude, awaiting, as it seemed, in mute suspense for some prodigious event.

“Knight of St. John,” said the Colonna, turning with a start, and flapping the iron lattice to, “you have seen too much. But I trust in your nobleness!—let us to our task—yet, but for this rebellious scum, and the intrigues of a devil in woman’s form!—but it matters not: let us to our work.”

Alfonso was much struck by the words, and what he had seen, but he made no farther allusion to them; for, compassionating the situation of the Colonna, he was anxious that he should at once accept the good terms which, if his situation were better known, might not again be offered to him. Fabrizio and his officers, indeed, made but little objection to any of the articles, which Cæsar himself had contributed to render unexpectedly mild and honourable; but the former added a stipulation with such earnestness, that it attracted the Hospitaller’s misgivings. He required that any punishment which he might inflict on certain traitors, who were convicted of having held a correspondence with the enemy without, should not be considered as any infringement of the terms by which the enlargement of the prisoners on both sides was stipulated.

The impolicy and dishonour of this concession made Alfonso declare that it could not possibly be assented to by the French. “Then must they send again when I have done it, and it may be out of debate,” said the chieftain, rising with sudden and angry vehemence. “Sir of St. John! I have found in you too knightly and noble a soul to deem that Fabrizio Colonna will not rather perish amid the ruins of all the earth, than surrender his brother’s daughter to be the paramour of her villainous seducer! His brother’s daughter!—a monstrous sorceress, who has seduced the people to revolt, corrupted the mercenaries with her gold, and even now, though famishing of hunger in the sanctuary, spreads her poison everywhere!—with her prophecies and ravings has won the people to resolve to surrender their city, publishing forsooth, that nought earthly can resist the fortune of the second Cæsar. But I have fitted her!—my

castle and its holders are faithful, and with its guns I can at least reduce the city to ashes—which I have sworn, unless they yield her up to a just doom, rather than suffer her to fall with the city again into her Borgia's foul embrace."

"Signor, this may not be!—and I did ever hear she was the paynim sultan's leman," said Alfonso.

"Then the Borgia shall the less reck when he sees her suffer the punishment due to her crime!" returned Fabrizio. "The monks ask only a fair pretext to yield her up, for they suffer her extremities by the watchfulness of my guard; and this I have found them in the ban which Cæsar hath delivered from his holy father, and which one of my prisoners, who hath an exceeding desire to be at liberty, and would have Capua taken only by the strong hand, confirms to them as the price of his redemption, deeming only that they are a sort of common and malignant traitors who have taken sanctuary from my vengeance; for against the fiend himself, were he guised as now in female garb, I doubt he could not be tempted by any bribe or fear to wag a finger, so besotted is he with young men's dreams. Hist, yonder he goes! Since you may not stipulate this matter with me, tarry here a short half hour, and it shall not need."

Speaking thus, the Colonna impatiently dashed open the lattice, and glancing into the square beneath, Alfonso perceived a body of men-at-arms crossing it through the throngs, which gave a slow and murmuring passage, escorting a knightly figure in armour, but without any weapon, and with his arms folded, and bound in a scarf as a prisoner.

"Why, who is he?" exclaimed Alfonso, with a start of very doubtful emotion. "It cannot be—and yet it is!—certes, it is the Knight of the Sun!"

"Ha, ha! and unless the woman of the Borgias has tickled your gills too, laugh with me at my mockery of the Borgia's jealousy," said Fabrizio, laughing hoarsely. "I spared him whole and sound for the sake of his matchless valour, but the damsel may owe me a reprieve when they are mixing their poisons, for her own! Nay, as you doubt, come and be the first to welcome him back to his liberty?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE STORMING OF CAPUA.

"Cry havoc! and let slip the dogs of war!"—SHAKSPERE.

Mechanically complying, it was some time before Alfonso rallied sufficiently from his surprise to remember the precise errand on which they were going; and meanwhile they had reached the square, and were winding their way through the masses of the people. A low continuous murmur followed them, but the attention of the majority was fixed upon the proceedings at the cathedral, with some within whose massive portal Sir Reginald was at parley. He spoke, in consequence, so loudly that Alfonso distinctly heard him aver that the sanctuary might with a safe conscience surrender the traitors who had taken refuge in it, inasmuch as the whole city had been placed under an interdict by the lieutenant of

the church, and all the rights and privileges of its holy places were withdrawn.

By the time Fabrizio and the envoy reached the steps of the portal, these assurances had produced their effect, or at least the famished guardians of the sanctuary, which, although the populace would not suffer him to break into, Fabrizio had kept closely blockaded, pretended to recognise their efficacy. The bolts were withdrawn, and the portal, slowly swinging open, revealed two pale and trembling monks, very aged, and nearly spent with long fasting and fear. A vista of the cathedral appeared beyond, terminating in the high altar under an emblazoned window, within a square tomb-like recess in which sat a female figure, wrapped in a rich mantle, the hands clasped, the chin crouching on its knees, and the eyes gazing madly towards the intruders.

Le Beaufort stared in utter amazement; a low and melancholy murmur arose among the people; and the very pikemen appointed to seize the refugee were pausing in doubt and fear, when Fabrizio arrived.

“Ha, heartless quarry! have ye not heard the ban of your sacred Father in Rome?” shouted the Colonna. “On with me, and drag her out of her hole, or I will begin the desecration by braining him that refuses on the threshold!”

“A noble deed hast thou done, and a knightly, betraying a woman!” said Alfonso, pushing past Le Beaufort into the cathedral after the angry Colonna; but his heart smote him at the bewildered and indignant glance which Le Beaufort returned.

Fabrizio rushed up the aisle, and the monks followed him totteringly, and even the soldiers with evident reluctance and fear; but Sir Reginald was removed at a signal from the Colonna, by his guard. Luckily the Hospitaller was there to moderate the first outbreak of the chieftain’s fury, for he plucked him back as he was about to ascend the altar to seize the victim, who, with a wild shriek covered her ghastly visage in her lap.

“Seize her!—Oh, well mayst thou hide thy face, thou monstrous harlot! Thou plague-spot in my blood, which must be cut out, or it will infect it all!” shouted Fabrizio. “A hundred crowns to him who clutches the traitress first.”

“My lord! remember it is your brother’s blood that you would shed,” exclaimed the Hospitaller.

“ ‘Tis false! I will burn her for the witch and pagan harlot and false nun she hath been adjudged!” returned the Colonna, with frantic fury.

“Then by all the holiness that hovers in these sanctuaries, Colonna, if you grant me not the mercy of this wretched dame, I will forth and proclaim the weakness of your sway, and make no peace with you but such as destruction seals,” said Alfonso; but the words shed no gleam of hope into the wretched fugitive. She raised her head, and stared wildly at the pleader, and despite the horror and anguish of her expression, Alfonso recognised the once brilliant Fairy Morgana.

“Nay, knight, plead not for me,—but least of all because of my father’s blood in my veins, lest it boil and burst its conduits!” she exclaimed, with the calm of despair. “I ask no mercy, none, of thee, brother of Agapit Colonna! but a heavier curse than Alexander’s light on your heads, false monks, that have so vilely betrayed the sanctuary of your God!”

“Daughter, we were nigh starved to death in your cause, insomuch that we were compelled to eat of the consecrated bread,” said one of the old monks.

"I spared your consciences—I partook not of it," returned Fiamma. "And therefore what ye have done, may the nations imitate; and your sanctuaries be indeed as powerless to save as the reeds in which the hare takes refuge!"

"The sanctuary is not violated, lady. The lieutenant of the church, Cæsar Borgia, has purposely banned the whole city, and disabled its sanctuaries, to prove that he is not thy seducer—that thou wert the paramour of Sultan Zem!" exclaimed Alfonso.

Starting up, and turning to the speaker with a glare of incredulity and horror, Fiamma seemed struck with his noble and austere countenance, for she exclaimed, "Can such as thou seemest lie like the basest churl, without a blush? And is not the death wherewith ye menace me sufficient for your vengeance? Hack me to pieces rather than use those words! But it is false, and thou art damned below even my place, to calumniate humanity more blackly than the fiends at the day of doom."

The monks tremulously asserted the truth of the statement, and observing the effect which it produced, Fabrizio reiterated it with a terrific oath; and then indeed did the countenance of Fiamma express a passion more terrible than the immediate presence of the most direful death had excited. "Ye lie, ye lie; ye are all of a conspiracy!" she shrieked. "Give me but an hour, but a moment, to warn him of your cruelty, and if he tear not down your walls to rescue me, hell is as true as he were false!"

"Seize her, I say, ye dastard dogs!" shouted Fabrizio. "Yet, knight, some mercy I will grant her at thy prayer: the axe shall drink her blood, ere the flames devour her body, which the betrayer shall never again behold."

"Hold, hold, Colonna! unless thou wouldest do the very will of thy mortal foe,—for is it not most clear how he desires her destruction?" exclaimed the Hospitaller. "Perchance because that she is the confidant of his crimes—because that he is weary of her, or would remove a scandal from his path—be not beguiled, my lord, into playing your enemy's game."

Fabrizio himself looked staggered at this argument, but it excited the furious wrath of her whom it was meant to serve. "Again, and again, and again thou liest! Would I were a man, to battle thee on it," she cried aloud in her mastering agony. "Thou art a man! Tell me, is man capable of such treachery? No, thou art a devil, and hast dreamed this on some burning pillow of anguish, and art sent hither that I may share thy hell in hearing it."

Even as Fiamma concluded this invective, suddenly as the bursting of a white squall at sea, arose an uproar outside the cathedral, which rang through all its aisles. But it was no longer the murmurs of an excited populace; shrieks and yells, the rush of unnumbered feet, mingled with distant shouts and blasts of trumpets, resounded. Fabrizio's instant apprehension was, that the populace had broken into an open mutiny in defence of the sanctuary; and he made an irresolute gesture, as if to seize Fiamma with his own hands. Alfonso caught him by the arm, and suddenly darting from the shrine, the lady ran up the steps of the altar, and seizing one of the massive pieces of gold plate which were piled on it as a place of safety from every spoiler, she shrieked—"Rescue, rescue! he comes, he comes!" till all the aisles rang again.

Fabrizio turned slightly pale; and yells from without were now distinctly heard, which returned a fearful chorus to the words—"Treason,

treason ! Borgia, Borgia ! Orso, Orso ! — Vengeance and the bonny broom-flower ! ” were sounds distinguishable above all the uproar.

“ False knight, hast thou betrayed me ! ” said the Colonna, turning furiously on the Hospitaller, with his hand on his dagger.

“ Heaven so help me ! — but harm not this guilty but more wretched woman,” said Alfonso, placing himself resolutely between the kinsfolk.

“ Tis but a new freak of the mob ! — I’ll quiet them with some broken heads ! — With me, knight ! I need some gage of your faith ! ” said the Colonna, still more startled with the sounds distinguishable in the tumult. Alfonso willingly complied, and together they rushed to the portals, before which the soldiery and mob were standing alike agape, while the battlements of the castle in front were covered with disordered masses of combatants, hurling one another frequently over, and ordnance was heard thundering at the gates which intervened to the street up which the knight had entered Capua.

Fabrizio turned, maddened with wrath at the treachery in which he imagined the envoy must have shared ; and undoubtedly his vengeance would have been bitterly wreaked upon him, if, discerning at a glance what had happened, Alfonso had not with great presence of mind and promptitude retreated into the cathedral, and suddenly closed and bolted the strong gates of the sanctuary. Distracted on the other hand by the progress of the stormers, Fabrizio shouted to his soldiers to advance, and galloped recklessly through the crowd to the castle-gate. But even as he approached it was burst open, and a mass of cavalry and spearmen rolled in, with cries of “ Kill, kill ! ” and the Colonna was surrounded by an infinite multitude of enemies. He was borne down by the pressure, and must in a few instants have been cut to pieces but for one of the assailants who covered him with his shield—and who was his own late prisoner, Sir Reginald le Beaufort.

The great body of the victors swept on, putting all to the sword whom they encountered ; and the crowds in the square, wedged in by their own multitude, were trampled and slaughtered in vain attempts at flight. Cæsar led on the havoc with unremitting fury, and the Orsini and the English archers, although they had recovered their lord living and well, were still animated by a rage which seemed as if it could not satiate itself with destruction. That the city was seized by a treacherous surprise, Alfonso could not doubt ; but he could only conjecture the result of the struggle within the barred gates of the sanctuary, which the affrighted monks now trebly secured—uncertain indeed from which side he himself might have most to apprehend. The rush and roar without, the shrieks and yells far and near, the terrific violence with which masses of the populace were ever and anon driven against the ponderous portals, the hellish hack and trample which were audible amidst the hurl of their flight, the cries of triumph, principally in French—soon gave tokens that the assailants were the victors. This was confirmed in a few minutes, when terrific blows of axes and spears were heard at the gates of the cathedral, and the voice of Cæsar reached Alfonso’s ears, shouting “ No sanctuary ! no quarter ! ”

Fiamma—who still stood on the altar, grasping the massive ornament she had seized, her nostrils and eyes dilated, and her black hair disordered like those of a frightened steed—distinguished the voice even at the distance, and with a delirious shriek of joy made the cathedral ring with her cries of “ Rescue ! I am here ! Cæsar, rescue ! ”

"Ho, without!—none are within here but Fiamma and myself, the Knight of St. John!" echoed Alfonso, thundering with the hilt of his sword at the gate so as for a moment to enforce audience.

"Burst open the gates! slay all whom ye meet!" Cæsar was heard to yell. "Slay all! all! death to the sorceress!—'tis religion to slay her!"

Fiamma heard not these words in the frantic cries with which she endeavoured to attract, as she imagined, the assistance of the friends whom she had so signally served; and for an instant Alfonso himself could not but believe that the tale of her love with Cæsar was unfounded. But as rapidly recalling all circumstances, and moreover hearing the peremptory orders to spare none within the sanctuary, indignation and wrath kindled in his soul almost to frenzy. He doubted not that there would be those among the assailants who would recognise himself and secure his own protection, but he determined also to preserve Fiamma at every risk. Leaving the doors to resist with their strength against the redoubled violence of the assailants, he rushed back to the altar; but as he approached, Fiamma raised one of the massive pieces of plate, and shrieked aloud that if he advanced any nearer she would hurl it at him.

"I would protect you, lady! or you are but lost; I heard Cæsar command these stormers to slay you as a witch and pagan paramour," replied Alfonso.

"Thou liest, recreant traitor! Cæsar has hazarded all to save me—I am saved!" she returned. "Help, my Cæsar! save thy Fiamma!"

Almost on the words the gates of the cathedral gave way with one terrific crash, and a horseman dashed forward, flourishing his falchion, striking innumerable sparks of fire from the once sacred pavement, and hounding on the rush of the spearmen who followed him. In a moment the cathedral was flooded with a tumultuous cataract of fugitives and of the merciless soldiery, some yelling for mercy and prostrating themselves beneath the relentless hoofs, others madly resisting and grappling with the steeds as their slayers hacked them down.

The foremost horseman halted, urging on the rest as a huntsman cheers the pack; but Fiamma, recognising him, attempted to rush down from the altar, exclaiming with frantic joy "Cæsar! my Cæsar! I am here," while Alfonso dashed forward, and seized her with such violence that she could not advance.

"What woman is this that yclepes us as familiarly as her dog?" said Cæsar. "Castellain, dost thou know her?"

"Horror and anguish, I know, have changed me! But, Cæsar, dost thou not know me?" said Fiamma, with an agony in her shrieking tones which pierced above all the uproar of human anguish around.

"Yea, forsooth! thou art my wife, harlot! art thou not? the castellain of Santangelo's wife? I am thy jest, thy wittol, the laughter of the carnival!" returned Migueloto, lashing himself into the fury necessary to stifle even in his breast the horror of the cruelty he meditated. Then raising his bloody axe he spurred his horse so furiously that it actually darted up the steps of the altar; but he reached not sufficiently near the victim to accomplish his murderous purpose, for the Hospitaller met him halfway, and dashing his shield on the charger's head, hurled both steed and rider over on the pavement below.

"Mark ye all, by this, the damsel is mine!" shouted the knight, clutching Fiamma by one arm, and pointing with his naked sword to the

prostrate castellan. "Take what share of the plunder else ye will, but this is mine!—Lady, come with me, or you are but lost! Soldiers, ye know me, the Knight of St. John!"

But despite this appeal, and his well known strength and courage, it was, perhaps, as well for him that at this instant Le Beaufort, the Orsino, and several French knights, galloped into the cathedral, shouting "Sanctuary! sanctuary! rescue the dame!"

The cry suspended for a moment the horrible destruction which raged around, and which had already covered the shrines with blood and brains, and the pavement with mangled carcasses.

"The Knight of St. John!—alive and well!—whom we have all gone raging mad to avenge," said Cæsar, instantly. "Now indeed is our glory and victory without a cloud, and I forgive Sir Reginald for snatching Fa-brizio from his just doom of traitor and parricide."

"Bear all the glory then, Cæsar! hell only will dispute it with thee!" returned the Hospitaller. "The only share that I demand in the treacherous success shall be—this fair paramour of Sultan Zem."

"What, the holy knight! the Knight of St. John! the woman-hater!" exclaimed Cæsar, laughing with mingled fury and derision until the lofty roof re-echoed.

"It is most just and rightful,—she is the prize of the Knight of St John," shouted the Orsini. "Lady, exult in your triumph, which achieves what all our Roman beauties might not."

"Take me from this man's clutch, Cæsar!—Cæsar, what means this?" shrieked Fiamma.

"I mean you nought but honour and safety, lady; or may these holy roofs crumble in upon me," said the Hospitaller. "I swear that I will lead you in all honour and safety to the presence and protection of Fa-brizio Colonna, if he be in French keeping."

But the words seemed only to increase Fiamma's terror, and she threw herself distractedly on her knees almost beneath the hoofs of Cæsar's rearing steed.

"In very truth, fair dame, this fancy for us is as sudden as any we have yet encountered, but we may not take thee from him whose pretty prize thou art—the holy knight!—in whose good word, good faith, thou mayst confide," said Cæsar, still laughing direfully. "Or if thou fearest here is my dagger!" And he mockingly extended the hilt of a sharp and bloody weapon to his suppliant. But, perhaps to his surprise, she darted up, clutched it, and holding it high in the air over her head—"Speak, fathomless traitor!" she shrieked, watching his eye like a tigress expecting the spring of the panther. "Never until now—because I would owe nought but to thy love—thy love!—have I warned thee that thy sorcerer, Sabbat, predicted that thou shouldst some day owe thy life to me, or lose it! Speak, shall I strike into this heart, since thine is harder than the steel which sheathes it?"

"She raves!—famine and fear have left her witless," said Cæsar, but not without visible trouble. "Yet it is fit that we should remember she did us some service in this great triumph. Migueloto, remove her to the castle with the rest of the female prisoners."

"None but myself shall be her escort," shouted the Hospitaller, and Migueloto staggered giddily forward: and the knights, above all the Orsino and Sir Reginald, in a general uproar of laughter and oaths supported his claim. Cæsar yielded, apparently without difficulty; and hal-

unconsciously Fiamma suffered the Hospitaller to draw her away with him, keeping her head still turned, and her eyes fixed on Cæsar with a glare of stupefaction, until she was out of the cathedral.

The castle of Capua was in possession of the conquerors; from its highest towers waved the French lilies glistering playfully in their azure field in the meridian light of the sun. To reach the gates, it was necessary to cross the great square, and never did war, when at his bloodiest work, present a more ghastly scene. The whole space was strewed with indistinguishable heaps of the slain, men, women, and children, and horses, butchered, trampled, brained, in all the most hideous forms of destruction. No signs of resistance appeared, and the work of plunder and lust had succeeded to that of slaughter. The square seemed covered with the wreck of some great earthquake, so strange and disordered was the ruin scattered over it. Rich furniture, jewels, chests of plate, bales of silk, and the commonest utensils of daily life, lay heaped around; the houses on all sides were broken into, and some were in flames; costly articles were continually thrown from the windows, amidst hideous laughter and hoarse shouts of joy and triumph. In each abode a separate tragedy was enacting; from each came forth dire shrieks of agony and despair mingled in one wild uproar with the yells of the victors. Women of the highest quality and richly garbed, struggled in the arms of the basest marauders, while some eluded the horrors of the fate of their companions by throwing themselves from the parapets of the houses. Palaces and churches were alike violated; nothing was sacred; nuns vainly shrieked for aid to the heaven to which they were devoted. The ban of excommunication pronounced on the city removed the only restraint on the passions of the demoniac soldiery, and prodigies of lust and murder were enacted on every hand.

Glancing down a street which led to the walls, Alfonso perceived the gateway at the end wrapt in a blaze, and as the thick oak burned off, there remained a species of iron network, the skeleton of a portcullis, through which, amidst whirlwinds of flaming smoke, appeared a multitude raging to enter the devoted city on this side also. A crowd of fugitives were pouring down a steep hill which led to the river Volturno, in the hope of saving themselves in some of the galleys whose gilded prows were visible; but the opposite bank was lined with archers, who kept up an incessant shower of arrows on all who appeared.

The unbounded horrors of the scene appalled even the fierce and anguish-struck soul of Fiamma, and she passively obeyed all the directions of her protector. To increase her terrors, as it would seem, they had scarcely entered the castle when direful yells resounded from without of "Kill all! no prisoners! kill all!" which were echoed from various halls and chambers of the fortress, crowded, as Alfonso now perceived, with Vitelli and Borgian soldiery. His first intention had been to lead his prisoner to the presence of the French generals, who were in the keep, and demand protection for her; but hearing these bloodthirsty cries thus echoed, and the despairing reiteration of Fiamma, "Not to him—not to Fabrizio!" and remembering, at the instant, the isolated tower to which he had been conveyed when he commenced the unfortunate negotiation with Fabrizio, he pushed open a narrow doorway which he also recollects he had entered, secured it after him, and dragged rather than led Fiamma with him to the lofty chamber above. The tower was used only as a post of observation, and, if at all visited, had been evacuated by the

assailants, so that he encountered no obstacle in his design. But the yells and shouts still continued, and finding the chamber deserted, and almost certain that some violent attempt would be made to seize or destroy Fiamma, he barred the doors with all their fastenings ere he endeavoured to restore her scattered senses. But when he turned, he was horror-struck to behold her crouched in a corner, with the dagger in her hand, watching his movements with a glare of mad defiance. “Devil though he be, I am his!—his I will die!” she kept repeating scarcely above her breath. And when the Hospitaller, in the most gentle and respectful manner approached her, and with assurances of the danger which he apprehended in a tumult doubtless raised by Cæsar to destroy them both, she suddenly darted at him, and struck so powerful a blow on his breast with the weapon, that his armour of proof scarcely turned the edge, and the blade shivered in pieces. But this effort exhausted her remaining strength, and she sank senseless as one deed at the feet of the knight.

To apply for any assistance or restorative was hopeless, and the uproar was now mingled with shrieks, probably from victims of the renewed massacre. But most fortunately, Alfonso found a half-emptied goblet of wine which he remembered Fabrizio had offered to him when he arrived. And beautiful, albeit so ghastly, as she was, never did mother tend her sick infant with purer or gentler anxiety than the chivalrous Hospitaller his young captive.

She revived at length, raised herself with a convulsive effort, and glared around, while Alfonso endeavoured by protestations and entreaties to soothe her perturbed imagination. But it was long ere his respectful demeanour conjoined with the conviction that she was utterly at his mercy, infused some belief in his words. Memory returned, and its progress seemed marked by the succession of shrieks which she uttered; and when from her wild rhapsody Alfonso comprehended all her devotion to the pitiless betrayer, and sufferings in his behalf; to what hazards she had exposed her life in corrupting the mercenaries in Capua; that, even when starving in the sanctuary, it was she who had gained over the German ritter who had admitted his legions; he himself could scarcely believe in such perfidy. His indignation at the treacherous advantage which Cæsar had taken of his negotiation was now deepened by the certainty he acquired that he had assented to it only to render his blow more certain and unexpected. But suddenly the torrent of recollections and ravings met in direful shock in Fiamma’s mind, and with a frantic peal of laughter, she exclaimed, “I see it all!—he yielded me to thee—to thee, the contemner of Lucrezia Borgia! And this is part of his plan to break her heart, and rid him of all fear of any suitor favoured by herself! But not the less will he slay thee, and both of us. Oh, foil this black perfection of his cruelty—Leave me to my fate!—in mercy, leave me!”

Not without a hope to obtain some revelation from one who was probably so well acquainted with the secrets of the Borgias, Alfonso declared the futility of this argument by darkly hinting at the reports of the co-partnership in guilt between Lucrezia and her brother. Fiamma replied by raving and yet sufficiently intelligible account of Cæsar’s project avowed to herself, which entirely refuted the charge, and agitated Alfonso with an emotion which all the riot and tumult that still raged had not stirred in his heart. But again he answered with the bitter rejoinder which his jealousy of Le Beaufort suggested, that Cæsar must now be aware that he was superseded in Lucrezia’s favour, if ever indeed he had obtained

place in it, by the famous English knight. Still more wildly Fiamma declared that he founded the suspicion on a treacherous assistance she had herself afforded to Cæsar in the carnival, when she enacted the fairy Morgana, and persuaded whom he directed by her artifices that she was Lucrezia. But still he reiterated his accusation against Cæsar, and when, in her desperation at the thought, she endeavoured some refutation by furiously accusing him of the object of his embassy from Ferrara—to rake up calumnies against the whole Borgian name—he replied by detailing in what manner Cæsar had learned the fact. He related the adventure of the valley of Egeria.

The suspicions which it is probable had long lurked in the heart of the miserable victim, direfully echoed these statements, which the heroic honour of the Knight of St. John's character confirmed. But yet she would not believe the inferences which he drew from all he had witnessed, and raved in her efforts to refute them, unheeding the dangers and horrors which seemed thickening around. But the Hospitaller meanwhile was aware that the uproar was subsiding, at least in the fortress; and he purposely prolonged and embittered the discussion to prevent Fiamma from yielding to the exhaustion which only the violence of passion for awhile had baffled. But in this frenzied dialogue, darkness came on, and she began now to rave in her entreaties that he would leave her, permit her to depart, to yield herself up to Cæsar's vengeance, and thus avert it from him; and Alfonso was deeply affected with her passionate declaration, that she had but one wish or hope left—to die by her betrayer's hand.

Alfonso promised only that as soon as he was satisfied that the tumult was appeased, he would hasten to the French generals to obtain some safeguard for her; and he opened the lattice which overlooked the square to discern what had happened.

The bright sun of the Campagna Felice had set on a scene of destruction and anguish than which human sufferings have rarely offered a sight more terrible; and now the serene and starry heavens of its night overlooked a spectacle more direful, when the slaughterers, bathed in the gore of six thousand human beings, and weary of destruction, held an infernal feast of debauchery and drunkenness amid the weltering carcasses of the slain. Illumined by the glare of torches or of flaming barrels of pitch, the whole square seemed like a vast pandemonium, in which fiends in human shape executed the worst devices of a satanic dream. Death himself could no longer give a refuge from the lust and nameless cruelties of those hideous bands, among whom Cæsar's own troops, composed of the refuse of many nations, amazed even their bloody comrades with deeds of horror and rapine. The duke himself was apparently the centre and prime reveller of the direful feast. Alfonso discerned him seated among the piles of rich spoil, surrounded by some of his most ferocious captains, quaffing huge draughts of wine, and laughing at the shrieks of a multitude of female captives, who were driven to his presence by the spears of his men-at-arms, with a number of male prisoners, torn from the places of concealment or refuge which they had hitherto found.

Himself and his direful company seemed engaged in scanning and selecting from these miserable groups, abandoning the great majority to the merciless soldiery and horrors unutterable.

“He looks for me among these groups—he thinks that thou hast perished in defending me.—Fabrizio too is dead for my crime, for these are the prisoners whom they have torn from the keep,” said Fiamma, in a voice

calm with despair. “Leave me, good knight! for thine own sake, for anon he will discover that I am not there, and he will slay us both.”

“None shall harm thee, lady, while I have strength to lift my sword,” said Alfonso. “But all seems quiet now in the citadel; and this isolated chamber is unsuspected, and the French, ‘tis certain, have expelled the marauders. I will to Louis de la Tremouille to demand, and I doubt not, to obtain, protection for thee, if thou wilt draw the bolts after me, or canst, whose strength alone may defend thee during a longer delay than I purpose making.”

Fiamma assented with wild eagerness to this plan of securing her safety, and although she could scarcely totter with weakness, she urged immediate action by complaining for the first time of the famine she had suffered. A few burning drops of anguish distilled from her eyes, and when the Hospitaller, with great tenderness and compassion, soothed her with assurances of his immediate and safe return, and yet at the same time unsheathed his sword to protect him on his mission, the contrast quite overcame her.

“And must thou, too—thou, too—most generous and noble knight—be sacrificed to preserve a wretch unworthy to live, whose destruction the most compassionate angels will smile on!” she exclaimed. “Why shouldst thou aid a thing who would not aid herself—whose only hope and refuge are destruction?—Eternal, if it might be!—But, farewell! There is no eloquence in thanks to pay thee, since deeds were vain. Save me, if thou wilt and canst, to the miserable years of unpausing anguish which only can await me—and farewell once again!”

Much affected, and embracing her with brotherly delicacy and tenderness, not unmixed, perchance, with the warth which beauty and the sense of protection inspire, Alfonso hastened on his mission, listening until he heard her draw the bolts within.

He found the passage in which the tower opened tenanted only by some carcasses wallowing in their own gore, and which he was not much surprised to observe were the badge of Cæsar. A flight of stone steps, leading to the principal chambers of the castle, was strewed with similar carnage, denoting that a fierce conflict had taken place between the marauders and those who had defended the prisoners against their blood-thirsty design, among whom was an English archer of Le Beaufort’s. The gate which admitted into the citadel on the summit of these stairs was massively barred and bolted; and it was with great difficulty, by revealing who he was, that he obtained admission through the guard of Swiss who held the chamber within. Guided by one of these men he soon entered the presence of the French generals, who were partaking of a disordered banquet with such of the knights as abstained from the horrible sports abroad, and their captives, among whom was Fabrizio Colonna. Le Beaufort and the Orsino sat on each side of him; and to their valiant succour, Alfonso afterwards learned, the Colonna owed his rescue from Cæsar’s marauders, who effected the recapture of nearly all the other prisoners.

Auxious to clear himself in the opinion of Fabrizio of any share in the treacherous surprise, the Hospitaller addressed the French commanders with vehemence, complaining of the share which would seem to be imputed to him in it, and imploring of them to put a stop to the slaughter.

“Cæsar hath all the glory or the shame of the deed, but war regards no treaties until the cross is kissed on them, and this bloody example shall spare the necessity of many more—therefore let the soldier rage his fill!”

said La Tremouille. "Moreover, all order and obedience are lost, and to restrain them now were only to provoke a fiercer outbreak than this we have quelled, since the Duke himself hounds them on. But, knight, methinks thou hast the less reason to lament the chance, since they tell us the fairest spoil in Capua fell into your clutch."

"I have saved a damsel of high name from dishonour, monseigneur," said Alfonso with indignation; "and it is to obtain your protection for her that I am chiefly here—whither, and to the noble Colonna, I would fain lead this hapless dame."

"Bring her to me! Send her to the stake, Frenchman! for a foul witch and traitress, or she will find some means to betray ye all!" said Fabrizio, furiously.

"Such protection as I can give, she shall receive,—bring her hither," said La Tremouille. "But if she be a damsel so light of love, I doubt me she will soon find a rival for your saintship in this presence."

"I at least shall not enter the lists, there, with the Knight of St. John," said the Orsino. "But shame on us, since we speak of one who bears, however unworthily, so noble a name."

"I will aid you to protect your prize, Knight of Ferrara, against the world," said Le Beaufort with generous warmth. "Or is she among yon forlorn crowd, and to be rescued? If so, though the retrieve be desperate, here is my sword with thine."

"It needs not. Let me have some food, for she is nigh famished, and a torch, and I will return anen," replied Alfonso; but Sir Reginald and several of the French knights declared they would accompany him, not without whispering licentious suspicions and conjectures, which he thought it best to refute by permitting their request.

Accordingly a considerable body went with him to the tower; and disregarding their significant glances, he led the way up to the isolated chamber, where he had left Fiamma. But his heart misgave him when ascending the steep winding steps he perceived that the door was thrown widely open. He entered—waved the torch anxiously around into every gloom—but no Fiamma was visible; and the incredulous smiles of his companions convinced him that they imagined he was only deluding them with a fair show, when he led them to this spot. The Orsino even laughed aloud, when he hurried to the lattice, and looked down the great height into the square below, as if he expected to descry her mangled remains.

"Unless he has thrown her there himself!" he muttered to Sir Reginald.

And indeed, recollecting the unbarred door, the conviction rushed upon the Hospitaller that she had either left it open to delude him on the fearful nature of her suicide, or had ventured on one scarcely less terrible by descending among the diabolical revellers below. Research for her in either case must now be in vain, and would expose himself to probable destruction if Cæsar found him in his grasp, in a position in which he could sacrifice him without his own direct agency. But the disappointment and sorrow of the Hospitaller would not permit him altogether to abandon the search; and he spent the whole night alone, anxiously watching all that occurred in the square below, but without observing aught to calm or increase his apprehensions, until the gradual silence of the ruined city, the chill of the morning air, and his own exhaustion, plunged him in a broken and horror-haunted slumber.

CHAPTER XL.

“ Have I not had my brain sear'd, my heart riven,
 Hope sapp'd, name blighted, life's life lied away,
 And only not to desperation driven,
 Because not altogether of such clay,
 As rots into the souls of those whom I survey.”—*Childe Harold.*

The second conquest of Naples was as rapid as the first, under Charles VIII ; and passing through town after town, which all surrendered alike at the first gleam of the French banners, Alfonso himself almost doubted he was in a dream when Naples capitulated, and he gazed over its glorious bay towards the blue rocks of Ischia, in which the unfortunate Frederic had taken his *last* refuge.

The French army pushed onward to take possession of the frontier assigned to them by the partition, in which the Borgias had artfully sown seeds of dissension which already began to germinate. Cæsar, with his auxiliaries, prepared to return to Rome, under pretext of completing the conquest of the cities claimed by the pontiff; and most graciously, and as the last essay in their chivalrous competition, Louis de la Tremouille conferred the command of the preparations against Ischia on the three knights of the Quest of Arms, as they were now generally called.

All the Hospitaller's unwearied researches had failed to acquire any information on the fate of Fiamma; and the demeanour of Cæsar to himself went far to convince him that he was not left in equal ignorance. But it was impossible to refuse so honourable a charge, more especially as his competitors eagerly accepted it; and the strength of the sea fortress, and the desperation of its holders, rendered its siege likely to prove the most dangerous achievement of the war.

The good understanding between the barons and Cæsar had for some time apparently been restored; but the most discreet politicians of Italy, who were not in the secret, were amazed to hear how strangely the Borgia had suffered himself to be outwitted by the barons, when, shortly after his return to Rome, news arrived of the revolt of Arezzo against Florence, and of the march of nearly all their strong and war-fleshed army into Tuscany, to support the insurrection, and restore the Medici. Cæsar meanwhile advanced with his own forces to the siege of Camerino, one of the cities reclaimed by the Holy See, in which even complete success would be of little weight against the enormous preponderance which the barons must acquire by the restoration of the Medici.

Meanwhile the war in Naples languished; negotiations commenced, and though the preparations for an eventual attack on Ischia continued, the Knights of the Quest were compelled to remain inactive spectators. But absence did not diminish the effect which Lucrezia's charms had wrought, in spite of all his resistance, on Alfonso's heart. The voluptuous languor of the climate of Naples, which counsels the oblivion of all but love, insidiously aided the magic of the recollections which haunted him. Apprehensions of the projects and success of the Orsino contributed to his uneasiness, which was finally excited to the highest degree when it was known that Paolo had suddenly departed for Rome. Immediately afterwards the compact by which the unfortunate King of Naples resigned his

crown was proclaimed, as if it had been purposely withheld hitherto; and the whole forces of the Orsino, whose command he had deputed to Sir Reginald le Beaufort, retired so suddenly from the camp, and by night, towards Rome, that it rather resembled a flight than a triumphant return.

Disdaining to share this precipitation, though burning with at least equal desire to behold Lucrezia again, Alfonso went to Naples to take farewell of the French commanders, and resign his charge. It was there that he first learned the astonishing tidings which had doubtless caused the Orsino's hasty return.

The grand combination by which Cæsar projected to secure to himself a great acquisition to his dominions, to compel the pontiff and Lucrezia into his favourite measure of raising an independent army by heightening the fears and mistrust on both sides irreconcileably, he had accomplished triumphantly in all its parts. The success of the barons in Tuscany persuaded them of his sincerity in offering to head them openly, even in defiance of the French. But to ensure success, he pretended that it was necessary the Duke of Urbino should assist with all his disposable force, and especially artillery, which his mechanical genius had brought to a degree of perfection as yet unknown. Guidobaldo fell into the snare, and while he emptied his states of his troops, and despatched them to attend Cæsar at Camerino, the latter's garrisons in Romagna concentrated, advanced on Urbino, and took possession of all the roads, passes, and fortresses on the frontier. At the same time Cæsar, turning aside on his way to Camerino with a select body of troops, suddenly invaded the defenceless territory of his ally with fire and sword. In two days, despite the attachment of the people to their ancient and generous lords, the whole of the rich and strong duchy was in Cæsar's grasp; Guidobaldo and his brother escaping with difficulty, in the disguise of peasants, to Venice. To complete the consternation of the confederates, Cæsar disavowed all participation in the revolt against Florence, and the French despatched a powerful body of troops to the assistance of the republic, who compelled the Vitelli to relinquish their conquests and retire from Tuscany. At the same time Alexander sent reinforcements to the siege of Camerino; and the barons, in the universal panic, not daring to offer any obstacles, its lord endeavoured to effect an accommodation with Cæsar. But the Borgia practised again the trick he had learned at Capua, and during the lull of the proposals he ordered a sudden assault, by which he obtained possession of the city and of the persons of the Varani. These potent nobles he condemned as traitors, and ordered to be strangled without the least regard to their illustrious blood and rank.

This extraordinary success, the destruction of a faithful friend to Ferrara, and the sudden neighbourhood of so ambitious and unscrupulous a power, were events of too portentous a nature not to hasten all the resolutions of Alfonso. He departed immediately on his return to Rome —where he had been long and ardently expected.

After the departure of the knights and of the French army, the splendour and gaiety of the pontifical court was, of course, very much diminished. Not only were the chief of its brilliant revellers gone, but Lucrezia herself —the very sun of its delights—was clouded with a sadness which all the vivacity of her character and genius could not dispel. Among those who grieved at the departure of the chivalrous array, Messer Pietro Bembo was certainly not to be counted. The absence of all those splendid competitors was not unpleasing to him, and his conclusions on the character

of Donna Lucrezia inspired the canon with hopes which he did not mention in his prayers. He redoubled the vigour of his attacks both in Latin and Italian verse ; and Lucrezia, whose fine taste as a poetess, and vanity as a beautiful woman, were equally feasted by these elegant effusions, took pleasure in encouraging, and not unfrequently in replying to them.

Meanwhile the interest attached to the dangers and glories of the absent knights was not altogether favourable to the canon's views ; until the report of the storming of Capua arrived, mingled with strange rumours, which Cæsar amply confirmed on his return by the bitter jests with which he assailed Lucrezia and her ladies on their failure with the Knight of St John, who had proved himself no saint by appropriating and concealing from all rivalry the fair paramour of Sultan Zem. Whether the canon found the deep melancholy into which Lucrezia fell on receiving this intelligence more auspicious to the flame with which he declared himself consumed, he certainly did not inform the Hospitaller when he went to greet him on his arrival.

Messer Pietro bore the pontiff's command to Alfonso to wait upon him in person, as soon as he had taken some rest, and meanwhile to resume his apartment in the Vatican. But in spite of this apparently favourable sign, the knight's secret apprehensions were much increased when he found that Bembo, once so earnest an advocate for Lucrezia, had totally abandoned her cause, and declared that he was now convinced of her licentious attachment for young Le Beaufort—since she could not dissemble her delight on his return, even before the direful rivals who watched their meeting.

The triumph of the Borgias was complete, for now it appeared that the King of France had abandoned the Vicars of the Church to their spoliation and vengeance, and the latest news announced that his heralds had publicly commanded the lords of Bologna to surrender that potent city to the renewed demands of the Borgias. The consternation struck into the confederacy was so great, that no murmur of resistance had been heard, but on the contrary, the barons unanimously tendered their forces to assist the duke in his enterprise. The canon was therefore earnestly of opinion, that to avoid a discovery, which was else inevitable and most perilous, the prince should quit Rome at once for Ferrara, without seeing either the pontiff or Lucrezia.

But the advice was not adopted by Alfonso, who declared with angry warmth that he would not condemn Lucrezia without proof ; that he knew a plan by which to baffle any immediate danger arising from his supposed embassy, if it were indeed true that her feeling for the English knight passed mere coquetry ; and that now, in his hour of triumph, the sincerity of the pontiff's professions was to be ascertained. The canon argued with great pertinacity, but Alfonso was not to be shaken from his resolution, and he hastened with all possible expedition to present himself at the palace.

His arrival was announced, and he was awaiting in his former magnificent apartment a summons to the pontiff's presence, when, to his great surprise, Alexander himself entered his chamber, accompanied only by the Datary. The eagerness of the pontiff was so great, that he merely spread his hands over the kneeling knight without uttering the usual benediction, and immediately began to speak on the subject in his thoughts. "Now must the lords of Ferrara credit us, were they more difficult of faith than he who scarce believed with his hand in the wound of the lance!" he exclaimed. "Thou seest, son, how God has given us to defeat all the ma-

chinations of our enemies and rebels, whom we project to crush like glass beneath our sandals, aided by the good alliance we think to secure with Ferrara. We will speak so plainly now, that your lords may have no pretext to doubt. Approach us; and, Giovan-Battista close all the doors, and be of our audience."

Alexander seated himself in one of the huge carved arm-chairs, and glanced around the magnificent decorations of the chamber with a darkening expression and a deep sigh. The bridal chamber of Lucrezia was also odious to the Hospitaller, and his empoisoned fancies suggested similar reasons for Alexander's evident distaste. Nevertheless, it was still kneeling that he awaited the pontiff's communication, who continued for some moments so lost in thought that he did not notice the attitude, and then with a gesture commanded him to rise.

" 'Tis true you are the envoy of our vassal, but one whom we have it in our intent to make sovereign," he said. "The church may well pardon our memory bartering her shadowy dominion in Ferrara for the substantial sway we have restored her in so many lands and rich cities, and specially if the Holy See is indebted to Ferrara in the manner we design for the restoration of Bologna, usurped during so many ages. We desire to conceal nothing from your lords, and we own that unless our alliance with them is concluded and thus firmly cemented,—even with the slippery aid of France,—the assemblage of an army of our barons, burning with their concealed hates and fears, were more dangerous to ourselves than to the usurpers of Bologna. On the other hand, to comply with our nephew of Romagna's passionately urged request, and raise an independent army to put into the hands of so young and ambitious a leader, were even as rash a venture as the Sun's when he gave his chariot to the guidance of Phæton, (if Messer Beniboo's legend lies not,) and scorched the earth with the fire that should but have warmed it. Yet I speak not these words in Italian rhetoric but Spanish earnestness—for we mean our magniloquence—and would have the princes of Italy understand, that it is more to their advantage than that of our greatness, that we deny Cæsar the mighty instrument which he demands. Yet, again, unless this alliance is concluded, which would effectually overawe the barons, this I must consent to—since 'tis not to be dreamed that I will put myself into the power of the men who have blasphemously prated of degrading us from the seat we occupy, and setting up in our place our bitter and contumacious rebel, Julian della Rovere. Neither will our niece listen to the Orsino courtship, nor do we now desire to knit friendship so close with usurpers so insolent, whose destruction grows daily more just and necessary."

It may be imagined that Alfonso was thrown into great perplexity by this direct proffer, which also revealed so alarming a glimpse into Cæsar's policy.

"But, holy father, it becomes my master's dignity that I should first be assured he has no refusal to apprehend from the magnificent lady herself," he said, at last, placing some hope of extrication or delay in this manœuvre.

"Son she hath submitted wholly to my will, and gave me her word to assure you, that whenever you make the public demand in your master Don Alfonso's name, she will return a public assent," said Alexander.

Alfonso was so completely taken by surprise in this announcement, that he knew not what to reply; and the pontiff, in his own eagerness overlooking the singularity of the silence, continued to discuss his projects with vehemence, which, coupled with the Datary's in-

sinuations, convinced Alfonso that both entertained well-grounded apprehensions of Cæsar's designs, especially the latter, who trembled during the whole conference so visibly, that his sincerity could not be doubted, though he had formerly been one of Cæsar's creatures and instruments. The rich promises held out by the pontiff, relating to the dowry which he intended to bestow on Lucrezia, with the remission of the allegiance and tribute of Ferrara to the church demonstrated his eagerness, but in nowise allured Alfonso; for the thought burned like vitriol on raw wounds in his soul, that Donna Lucrezia had either brought him into the dilemma to effect his destruction by the discovery of the futility of his pretended negotiation, or to compel him to save himself by a precipitate flight from Rome, that she might be rid of his espionage, and abandon herself more unreservedly to her passion for Sir Reginald.

Luckily the pontiff was too much absorbed in his own thoughts and passions to observe those of the Hospitaller; and as if that were the only point in debate, he concluded the audience by desiring the knight to attend him to the presence of Donna Lucrezia, to receive a confirmation of her assent from her own lips. Alfonso began to perceive the full peril of the part he was playing, and to anticipate some sharp retaliation from Lucrezia. But it was impossible to refuse the offered honour, and with a strange mixture of emotions he found himself following the pontiff into the palace of his daughter on a business so opposed to his real purposes.

On entering the saloon in which Lucrezia sat, the knight was at first much relieved by perceiving that a numerous court was present. But the secret serpent stung into his bosom again when a glance showed him that Lucrezia was playing at chess with Sir Reginald, in a remote window too narrow to allow of any third. Le Beaufort's doting gaze was so fixed upon her that it seemed as if he could scarce notice what moves he made on the board; and Lucrezia was speaking to him in a laughingly triumphant tone as they entered, at the same time making an eager move to secure her advantage. This put her hand over to Sir Reginald's side of the board; and, if no one else, at least the Hospitaller observed that Le Beaufort, feigning to bend down to discern what had happened, pressed, his lips to its delicate whiteness with instantaneous but most passionate fervour. It was true that he turned pale, and that she drew her hand hastily away; but the next instant he beheld her press the mark to her own lips, and he distinctly heard the words uttered gently and tenderly, "False knight! it burns even my lips that would cool the smart!"

Indignation gave the Hospitaller firmness, and he stood coldly and haughtily before the lady as she rose to receive her sire, scarcely seeming to observe his presence. But when Alexander stepped aside, and revealed him with a smile, it is certain that tears gushed to her eyes, although she tacitly denied their presence by making no attempt to wipe the sparkling drops away. Some cold words of welcome she uttered, with an emphatic glance, as if explaining the circumstance, to Alexander, towards a group in a balcony on which the saloon opened, against the balustrade of which leaned the Duke of Romagna, looking into the apartment, but seemingly in a gay discourse with a crowd of ladies and young courtiers.

"Señor, we have not forgotten the somewhat austere and rebuking visage of the Knight of St. John," said Lucrezia, carelessly, as Alexander named him with great significance; and turning with an arch smile to Sir Reginald, she continued, "And now your friend the Orsino can have no

apology to refrain from presenting himself before us, to hear the decision of our quest. Therefore we bid you summon him, and come yourself tomorrow, at our old evening hour and according rather to the customs of ancient chivalry than of those in our decaying times, give a true and unboasting account of your exploits; upon which we will deliver our judgment on some following day."

"Might it not please your grace to name the earliest, inasmuch as my longer tarriance in Rome is forbidden," said Alfonso.

"Why, then, the next be it," returned Lucrezia, turning away.

"Ha! thou wouldest lodge thy prey in security?" said Cæsar, who had joined the circle, in a tone of good-humoured raillery. "Dost fear, good knight, that having so long had the scandal I should project sharing the advantage, and rob you of your bright Capuan prize, the rich leman of Sultan Zem?"

"I fear your highness hath already wrought me as evil a turn," replied Alfonso, with stern serenity, and rejoicing in the opportunity to inflict the pang on the haughty lady of the Borgias which her reply betrayed—

"Nay, nay, my lord, we have too sharp experience of the Knight of St. John's—what is the word?—it matters not—the thought is on all your minds—to doubt him in this matter!" she said, with a singular gleam of disdain and suppressed anguish on her lips.

"Why, then, sir knight, if you will sell your prisoner, as the French have done theirs in the public market of Rome, I will bid you as fair a price as a Turk or an old cardinal," persisted Cæsar, laughingly.

"I sell not human blood!" returned Alfonso, coldly. "Nor would I counsel any man—not even your *friend* the Orsino, knight of England!—unless his bosom be of congenial stuff, to harbour a serpent in it!"

"What means this Italian wit?—Alack, I have no skill in schoolmen's edge-tools, but I wear a soldier's!" said Le Beaufort, with extreme fierceness—but he met the glance of Lucrezia, and his high bearing suddenly drooped.

"Let us hope, at least, that into whatever hands the unhappy Colonna has fallen they are better than those she escaped from, whose license neither Turk nor—cardinal! said the duke that was one himself—could surpass!" said Lucrezia. "Let it suffice, we have declared our will, and with the sacred permission, Sir Reginald and I will conclude our interrupted game."

The Hospitalier soon retired from the tormenting spectacle of his rival's triumph; and on returning to his apartment he commanded Bembo to make every arrangement for their departure immediately after the ladies had pronounced their decision. In a very unusual manner the canon had kept away from the court; and he set about fulfilling these orders with an alacrity which surprised his lord, and convinced him that he should soon have no loophole of evasion.

While Bembo was engaged abroad and with great caution in making his arrangements, Alfonso passed several hours in a fretful fever of agitation. And it was drawing towards sunset, in the midst of his unpleasing reverie, when a page entered with a smile of recondite meaning, and informed the religious knight that a damsel, closely veiled, who professed herself to be one whose honour and life he had saved at Capua, requested to be allowed an interview to offer her gratitude. Startled with the instantaneous recollection of Fiamma, Alfonso rebuked the page's leer with a stern glance, and an order to admit the visitant.

A female form, enveloped in a dark Venetian robe and mantle, glided in, and it scarcely needed the action with which she followed the disappearance of the page, revealing a visage whose fixed pallor, anguish, and resoluedness recalled that of the Destiny she had formerly enacted, to inform Alfonso that he beheld Fiamma Colonna.

“Lady! and do I indeed behold you on this side of human anguish? And have you ventured into Rome, into the capital of your enemies?” was Alfonso’s astonished greeting.

“Nay, more!—into their castle, into their very arms!” replied Fiamma, bending her brow on her hands, and clenching them until the blood almost sprang from the tips of her fingers. “I am, as I was wont to be, the dismal queen of a sepulchre, of Adrian’s tomb—a prisoner, but that I have means of evasion unknown to my jailers. Yet even he—even Cæsar Borgia!—might trust in the madness which conducted me to his feet that dreadful night—to know the worst, rather than to apprehend it!—to perish by his hand without leaving him the refuge of dreaming me debased by another! Pardon me, noble knight, my blood hath lost all its woman-tints, else should I blush to say that even your generous honour might not have secured me from his suspicion. I chose rather to die—and dreamed that he relented when he concealed and spared me. Yet it was but to darken thy renown with Lucrezia, and assay her to the quick with the black calumny he hath breathed upon thy name!”

“It matters little; she is intent on other matters now,” said Alfonso, bitterly.

“But there is vengeance—vengeance yet, for all!” said Fiamma, clenching her teeth with an instant but terrific expression. “No, not for all! He hath wronged me beyond all vengeance—but for thee!—Art thou still of the mood to acquire those certainties for thy lords, which ‘tis affirmed thou art in Rome to win?”

“Yea, and at every risk,” replied Alfonso.

“Why, then, thou mayst report that she loves!—loves where ‘tis guilt to love!” said Fiamma. “What didst thou tell me, in mine agony, that the Penitentiary revealed to thee?”

“He who is now imprisoned in Santangelo?” replied Alfonso, evading a direct reply.

“Even he!—and treated with a marvellous severity, denied all visitation; confined in so deep and gloomy a dungeon that men marvel how—unless by supernatural illumination—he can read the book which monks tell us is of God, over which he is ever raptly poring! A strange, a marvellous man!” said Fiamma, with a slight shudder.

“Yea, a saint,” returned Alfonso.

“Or a devil, permitted to wear the form to tempt the whole race of mankind to a second fall worse than the first, denying that religion which redeemed them!” said Fiamma.

“Nay, that is woman’s office, even from the beginning,” replied Alfonso, with great bitterness.

“We wander—let us return to the matter,” said the Colonna, hastily. “Lucrezia’s confessor!—it is enough you understand wherefore I feigned an anguish which would it had indeed been remorse, that I might once again feel humanly, to win Migueloto’s sufferance to speak with him. The murderous catalan hath a religion of his own, and even while he whets his knife for my throat in secret, would have me do what I may to rescue my condemned soul. I will not be tedious to tell you of all the bleak

discourse we held, than which none direfuller is exchanged among the despairing ones in their halls of fire; and yet he could not fright me with all the terrors of his eloquence; wherefore I deem, that happen what will, fear cannot be among the sufferings in store for me! He won me to no quality of repentance, for my soul is exhausted now of all but the hope and purpose of vengeance; but I, with subtleties and dark suggestions of my wrongs, won from him confirmations, obscure but fiendish, of the thought which glows like a ball of fire in my brain, and will anon expand and fill all space with its hell! And yet something it seemed that this horror existed only in the intents of the dire criminals—might yet be baffled—but scarcely do I know how he subdued me into hazarding life on the merest die by procuring his secret egress from the castle, on his simple pledge to return ere his departure could be noticed—but that I value it no more than gamesters the pawn they play in sport ere they stake their gold!"

"I guess the remainder—that he fled! But with what marvellous purpose did you suffer him to quit Santangelo?" exclaimed the Hospitaller, now much agitated.

"To seek out his penitent—to startle her from her guilty security—and with the terror of his denunciations, and such added majesty as his miraculous evasion might give, (and it was no less a miracle that it was wrought by human agency,) affright her—if not too late—from the black depths wherein she was sinking," replied Fiamma. "But that you may marvel the more, noble knight, know that the monk kept his word to the letter, and returned with no constraint but his own pledged word and confidence in his Master's promises, to his loathsome and most perilous dungeon."

"Marvellous indeed! But what beset him on his mission?" said Alfonso, breathlessly.

"I had learned for him that Lucrezia was in the valley of Egeria, whither she oft retires of late; and he found his time to speak to her alone," replied the Colonna. "Ay, in her terror and superstition she confessed that she loved!—loved with such madness that she knew no longer how to resist!—that her passion was full of guilt and despair!—and its strength may be argued when no extremity of terror or threat could wring from her the name of him whom she thus worshipped!—for the true instinct of love taught her it was dangerous. Patience, good knight, for the monk, in his wrath at her contumacy, has promised to reveal to me the horrible intents and prodigious crimes of him whom the fiends also call Cæsar Borgia."

"Yea!—and by what necromancy?" exclaimed the Hospitaller. "But it needs none to reveal the beloved one's name—I swear it! 'tis Reginald Le Beaufort!"

"Necromancy!" repeated Fiamma, gazing with a startled expression at the knight. "None but the dead, indeed, can reveal the full horror of the Borgia misdeeds! And if thou hast courage to endure the incalculable terror of such a presence—as I have!—thou too mayest acquire the certainty which it is thy dangerous errand here to obtain."

"As thou hast?—the presence of death!—certainty!" repeated Alfonso, shuddering, but not altogether incredulously; for the universal belief of the age was in accordance with the possibility and actual occurrence of such events.

"The friar hath his scruples—and I am bound by direful oaths," said

Fiamma, brushing the deathlike dew from her pale brow. "Neither, perchance, hast thou ever heard of his unearthly penitent, the magus, Dom Sabbat?"

"I heard great rewards proclaimed for him in the jubilee, by Cæsar's command," replied Alfonso.

"It was given out—to assist in the pageantries prepared—but in reality to conjure from them an unbidden guest; at least to compel it to some utterance of its dread silence," said the Colonna. "To this intent, the penitentiary has for awhile withdrawn his prohibition; and to-night, if thou darest to share the hazard with me, in the catacombs, shall we behold the murderer in the presence of his victim, and hear him reveal the depths of his black soul in the horrors of his fear and deprecation!"

"May such things be?—Can the grave indeed be compelled to yield up its fearful habitants?" said Alfonso.

"If the spell fails, yet will the dark conscience which has already raised this thing work as powerfully as any sorcery," replied Fiamma. "And the conditions of the fiendish mass require a confession which shall teach other listeners than the demons the truth, even from those lips that least of all would utter it."

"Yet in the catacombs! So black a mystery to be enacted in so holy a scene!" said Alfonso, and yet without balancing in reality an instant to accept even so dangerous a means of relieving himself from his rack of uncertainty.

"The robbers and murderers of Rome, who make the catacombs their sanctuary, have banished all hallowedness from the precincts—the fiends stalk visibly through the galleries, as of old angels wandered among the relics of the martyrs, graving their sufferings in the enduring rocks," replied Fiamma. "But even as thou wilt!—take time to deliberate, where I, who am a woman, paused not an instant! Thou art a valiant soldier, and I have cause to know it; but true it is, this is an enterprise wherein thy tried steel can nothing avail thee, for if thou venturest, it must be in sh daw and in secrecy! Resolve, knight, for I must return to my place of anguish, like a doomed ghost when light dawns over churchyard graves; but if thou darest this assay, which shall set thine and thy master's soul at rest for ever in certainties, speak, and I will meet thee at the gate of San Sebastian, guised as a mendicant friar, to guide thee to the place of rendezvous—an hour at least before midnight, for at midnight they meet in it."

Thus spurred on, and urged by the desire which consumed his soul, Alfonso solemnly pledged himself to run whatever risk might be incurred in the adventure, and to meet Fiamma at the spot and hour which she named. A glare rather than a smile of satisfaction lighted up her features; and with this compact they parted.

The hope that a full discovery of the crimes of Lucrezia would restore him to the peace of which he felt himself else for ever deprived, continued to support the Hospitaller against the thousand arguments and suggestions of danger which assailed him after the departure of Fiamma. With all her motives of vengeance, might she not still be the instrument of Cæsar, employed to entrap him to his destruction, which the evil reputation and desolation of the locality to which she invited him would facilitate? But Alfonso could not bring himself to believe in such monstrous ingratitude, and there is a magic in the tones of sincerity which involuntarily compels the human heart to trust.

CHAPTER XLI.

Iago. You would be satisfied?

Othello. Would? nay, I will.

Iago. And may: But, how? how satisfied, my lord?—*Moor of Venice.*

The agitation of the knight's thoughts consumed time almost imperceptibly, and night set in so darkly, that he made the necessary preparations for his adventure, concealing his armour and visage as much as possible in his long black mantle and hood. He had dismissed his esquires and the canon, and was preparing to quit his chamber, when a gentle rap at the door apprised him of a new visitor. He opened it, and by the light of a little silver lamp, which she was carefully shading, he beheld, to his surprise—Mona Faustina!

“ My lord, pardon your poor servant!” exclaimed the old woman, entering rapidly, and speaking with great agitation from among the muffles of her toque. “ My lord, I am a most miserable old fool, and I can call myself so from the day I was born; for my fortune has been my bane, and to be the nurse of the sweetest lady in Rome (whereof squires' wives had been proud, and I had nothing but my red cheeks at that time to recommend me).—But lose no time, my lord, and if you can, come and save her, or we are all lost, and the poor, handsome young knight of the far sea-land will run into perdition as sure as the Tarpeian rock! O, signor, he was your friend, whatever hath happened; and on my knees, and with these salt tears, I beseech you—save us all!”

“ When I can understand a meaning in your plaints, mother, doubt not my will to serve you.—I pray you, give me a glimpse of your purport,” said the Hospitaller.

“ I dare not to my lord the duke; he kills *all but one*, and my heart aches with compassion for the poor young spendthrift, who thinks no more of a Venice ducat than another of a base half-florin!” continued the duenna. “ Moreover, his gracie bade me come to you in danger, in his absence; but the moon was not then at such a full. Woe is me, detestable old kite, that tear out my young one's bowels! Yet, if you cannot turn him back, I must lead him on, for never until now was she so bent to have her way; and they shall make fritters of me for the pope's elephant ere I will betray her to the duke; so come thy gait, for the love of all loveableness, cavalier, and you will find him on the terrace waiting me; and do thy best to turn him back, or indeed I cannot help myself, and he will come to as evil an end as a hornet in the bees' hive, for all it be among the honey.”

“ Whom—on the terrace—shall I find?” said Alfonso, with a deadly sickness at heart.

“ It wants but a moment,” returned Mona Faustina. “ I have only a few minutes' grace, in my lady's impatience!—Sir Reginald! young Sir Reginald!—whom she has sent for under pretence to confer of the Orsini business in privacy—ay, in very troth, at this hour, and in her own proper chambers.”

“ Is it even so!—Why then, what is that to me?” said Alfonso, staggering as if he had just received a mortal blow. “ Go on thy way, hoary pander! what is it to me?—I say again, and again, and again, what is it

to me? Would it were rather a dagger cleaving my heart!—Hasten, fly, hag, and warn the duke. Let him avenge! He knows the style of old;—but begone for ever from my sight, loathsome old woman, whose gray hairs shall make age henceforth dishonourable."

"Nay, son!—that we should all go mad at one time," sobbed the duenna with evidently strong emotion, though perhaps not caused by the motive she alleged. "Then I must away and do my duty, for a man cannot serve two masters, nor a woman either, and Madama Lucrezia sucked at these breasts, unworthy as I am to say it; and blood is not water, and milk is more than blood, if you had ever had a sweet little nursling to know it!"

"Mona Faustina! stay—I will go; I will cross this villain's path to his guilty paradise," exclaimed Alfonso, after desperately permitting the old woman to reach the threshold at a very slow and wistful pace; and overtaking her with a couple of strides, he added, "Lead on, but do not speak; I have no tongue to answer thee."

Faustina immediately led the way to the great hall which divided the part of the palace inhabited by Lucrezia from that tenanted by the successor of the Prince of Salerno. An open archway at one extremity admitted on a terrace, which being flanked by a high dead wall of the palace on one side, and a steep and lofty bank wooded with orange trees and myrtles on the other, was not much frequented by any of the denizens of the Vatican by day, and still less by night. Mona Faustina signified in a whisper that it was there she expected to find the young English knight, and cautioning the Hospitaller to make all haste in removing him from the dangerous locality, if possible, she retired on tiptoe with her lamp, leaving the Hospitaller to pursue his adventure alone and in darkness.

He hastened on to the archway, and looking with what eagerness may be imagined from its shadow, he quickly discerned the figure of a man wrapped in a cloak, seated on a balustrade at the end of the platform. His eyes were fixed with an intense glow of impatience on the rising moon, which was almost on a level with the sumptuous gardens below; and the fair visage, though flushed and deeply agitated, was that of Sir Reginald le Beaufort.

Alfonso quietly stepped forth, strode to the edge of the terrace; and after a momentary survey slowly paced up the platform, walking like a man in a reverie, and without seeming to notice Sir Reginald until he was close to him. Then stepping slightly back, he looked at him with so rapid a scrutiny that although the knight plucked his plumed cap over his face he could not hope that he had escaped recognition. "Sir Reginald le Beaufort, can it be?" said the Hospitaller, without much apparent agitation. "I pray thee, our sometime brother-in-arms, art thou too hedged in the palace, or how chances it thou art here?"

"Signor!—but it seems you know me," replied Le Beaufort, after a moment's pause of confusion. "Nay, I deny not my name—nor my business either, sithence the damsels of this court are fair, and an ancient crone whispered me to be at my devotions to our Lady on this terrace at this hour, and if I prayed heartily I should hear good news. Matter enough to stir a young man's curiosity—but it fears me I should be alone."

The blood thronged so thickly about Alfonso's heart that he could scarcely breathe; the drops of agony poured from his brow, and he continued for some moments to gaze in silence on the quivering and flushed visage of the Knight of England.

"Harlot!" he muttered between his clenched teeth. "But no, no! Is it possible that the air of Italy can also corrupt natures like thine into treason so double-dyed! Reginald, it is not thus!—Lucrezia—Lucrezia!—it is to Lucrezia thou wendest?"

"Lucrezia!" repeated Sir Reginald, with certes a confessing paleness, and suffering his cloak to drop aside in his absorption, the richness and bridegroom splendour of his garb beneath was revealed. "Lucrezia!" he continued, rallying with mingled fierceness and confusion. "And what if it be!—what if her grace give private audience to other secret envoys than those of Ferrara? Well thou wottest that all thy toil has been, and still is, to find matter to render thy hatred of this lady reasonable in men's sight; and yet thou treacherously feignest to be a secret emissary to promote the alliance, and thereby is the Orsino driven to distracted thoughts and plans. And though I hoped not so great an honour, nor do intend in other manner to reveal thee than by urging her to put thee to immediate assay—But how darest thou to arraign me, or my deeds? Let them be what they will, I am here to abide the consequence."

"The spell is heavy upon thee—the crimson and purple flowers amidst which the syren sings beside the rotten carcasses of her victims!" said Alfonso, wildly. "But thou shalt not listen to her voice, or thou art lost! Reginald, away with me!—we will leave this palace, Rome itself, together. There is no other refuge from the spells of the sorceress!"

"Not for all the realms which the sun set on to-night will I refuse the obedience due to my gracious lady's command," returned Le Beaufort. "I am a free knight of England, and have taken no wage of yours: therefore, exercise no mastery, for I own no vassalage."

"Certes, it is true!" said Alfonso, folding his arms and laughing with excess of bitterness. "And thus, at length, it befalls that to thy friendship I owe that I have achieved the object of my journey, and can bear home to my sire a sufficient answer to all his importunities, unless he would have me seek a bride in the sinks of his capital. Revel in thy Eden up! she is weary of thee and gives thee to the knife, or her sire or her brother detect and spare her the pains!"

"Of what rave you, signor?" returned Le Beaufort, furious, he himself, perhaps, scarcely knew whether with the consciousness of his own guilt or innocence. "But if you accuse me for that—nay, I deny it not!—her grace is pleased to command my presence on matters relating to the Orsini; and I have obeyed, and will obey, though all the fiends and the swords of ten Alfonsoes stood in my way!"

"Reginald! if it be possible that thou beguilest thyself with this specious saying, listen to me!—I tell thee the sorceress deceives thee into the betrayal of thy noble friend, of every faith of man," said Alfonso, panting for breath as he hurried on. "Thou knowest—thou caust not doubt—that she loves thee, at least as women of her matchless baseness love, more evanescently than the most vile and changeable of men. I tell thee it is not in humanity to resist, were it thrice subdued by years of fasting and solitude! Thou shalt not go! thou shalt not add to the heap of her most wretched and deluded victims."

"Lord of Ferrara! it might content you to rake amidst the slime of this foul city for matter to asperse this most beautiful and virtuous lady—but for my cause, while my hand can clutch the hilt of a sword thou shalt not!" exclaimed Sir Reginald, tremulous with rage and shame.

"Thou seest—I humbly hold my peace!—ay, the sword was given you

to be her swashbuckler !” said Alfonso, laughing and scoffingly filling the hilt of the young knight’s weapon.

“ For this, among other matters, shalt thou aby a reckoning yet,” said Sir Reginald, yielding to the passions of his fiery nature.

“ Let it be now then, braggart boy!—or, softly, thou art not harnessed now for these rough wars! Go, bid Lucrezia arm her champion!” retorted the Hospitaller in a wild jeering tone. “ Yet, stay! a safer vengeance may be thine! Go and tell her that the envoy of Ferrara, who rakes the mud of Tiber to bespatter her withal, is Alfonso the prince!”

“ Ha, truly! I do detect thy craft! Thou art enamoured of the perfection thou hast failed to darken with eternal ignominy, and to keep an outward consistence wouldst have me betray thee to the Borgias that they may compel thee to marry their divine daughter!” said Le Beaufort, with a flame of jealousy bursting out in spite of all his efforts to conceal it. “ Go to, go to! I am not the shallow fool thou wouldst find me; and I swear by the spurs I won in a bloody field I will rather kill thee than betray thee to such a doom !”

“ Are life and death sb absolutely in the hands of the mongrel Normans of beyond sea?” retorted Alfonso ; adding with a convulsion that shook his whole stalwart frame, “ But it is false! I loathe and spurn thy vile paramour worse than the vilest of the leprosy-tainted camps of France! And to prove it!—to night—be safe! I leave thee to thy happiness, I will leave the Vatican itself; and will be as secret as its darkness, if—in some pause—thou wilt bid her give thee the coronal of the tournament, that I may have a fair pretext to pluck thy heart out in some market-place! She will not deny thee so small a recompense as my disgrace and scorn ; and if it be necessary to deceive the Orsino longer, thou canst sigh and swear by some pretty oath thou wouldst rather he had it than thy goodly self, an if thy merits might have suffered it.”

“ Not as hoping—believing—this, but in thy defiance, will I tarry here, and abide my fortune,” returned Le Beaufort furiously, and clutching Alfonso by the mantle in his rage; but plucking it away with a violent gesture the Hospitaller stalked into the shadow of the arch, and almost instantly disappeared.

In the first tumult of his thoughts the Hospitaller himself scarcely knew how he left the precincts of the palace, or whither he was wending his way. The strife of a mortal conflict would have seemed to him a pleasant exchange; and in this mood, when he suddenly recollected his appointment with the Colonna, a kind of joy in the thought of its dangerous nature, and in the recollection that it promised him a full revelation of the crimes of Lucrezia, neutralized for some moments even the poison of that which he had just made.

The time was already advanced, and he hastened with all possible rapidity to the place of appointment, and at the gate of San Sebastian he encountered a figure which, though closely enveloped in the cowl and weeds of a monk, he knew by a signal to be Fiamma. They passed in silence through the gate, and leaving the well-remembered Egerian valley to the left, proceeded with rapidity over the plain. The antique basilica of San Sebastian soon appeared in sight, whence the remote swell of triumphant anthems was fitfully audible on all the changes of the wind. But instead of taking the beaten path to the church, in which was the usual entrance to the catacombs, Fiamma turned off over a wild irregular heath, diversified with deep hollows and tall clumps of bramble

and juniper bushes. Descending one of these little dells, which seemed as if excavated at some remote period in the sandy soil, they arrived in front of what appeared to be two or three grottoes hewn in the rock, half choked with weeds and fallen fragments.

Into one of these Fiamma glided with the easy velocity of a serpent accustomed to all the windings, but Alfonso involuntarily hesitated. The tales he had heard of the extent and intricacy of the catacombs, and of the dangerous personages who frequented them, forcibly occurred to him. But while he paused the clink of two flints was audible, and by the flashes which accompanied it he discerned that Fiamma was on her knees blowing some dry leaves into flame, and kindling a torch. Ashamed of his fears, and reanimated by the recollections which came upon him, he advanced into the grotto, and assisted to kindle the torch. When this was effected, in compliance with Fiamma's desire he drove a strong pointed stake with which she furnished him firmly into a cleft of the sand-rocks which walled the grotto. A circular groove was filed in the neck of the stake, and to this she now fastened the end of a ball of twisted silk with such multiplied precautions as showed that it was a matter of importance. Fiamma then put the ball in his hand, and taking the torch, said with a melancholy smile, "And now, how beats thy heart? Darest thou follow me?"

"Ay, if it be over black adders!" returned the Hospitaller; and yet it must not be denied that when he perceived the intent of his guide, for another moment he hesitated again. He found that he was in a low cavern excavated in sand-rocks, with several arched passages branching off in various directions, into one of which Fiamma now led the way, with an emphatic caution to keep the clue in his hand, and unwind it as they proceeded. The torch but dubiously illumined the darkness into which they almost instantly passed, but the knight felt they were ascending by the slope of the ground against his feet. The passage was scarcely wide enough to permit an explorer to stretch his arms, and was unevenly walled on each side with chalk and sand. Proceeding in silence and with rapidity, the silk skein gradually sunk until it was on a level with the ground, and the Hospitaller found they were in another cavernous excavation, from which radiated three narrow galleries, one of which descended in an inclined plane of precipitous rapidity to a great depth, at times scarcely the height or breadth of a man, at others jagged like a fissure made by an earthquake, following the vein of the sand-beds. The Colonna spoke scarcely a word, but occasionally she held up the torch as she advanced, at times revealing dark openings where the gallery was crossed by other passages, but oftener some ancient inscription, or rude bas-relief, depicting the sufferings of the Christian martyrs interred within niches in the walls.

The dense tomb-like scent of the air began to exercise a chilling influence on the Hospitaller; and the frequent crumbling of sand and rock on their way, awakening dismal and seemingly supernatural sounds in the remote echoes, as if the silent citizens of that vast necropolis complained of the profanation of their abodes by the presence of life; the labyrinthine confusion in which they seemed fast involving themselves; doubts of the purposes of his guide—continued to assail his spirit, and shake its natural firmness and courage. It may be imagined that he did not fail to observe Fiamma's direction in unwinding the clue, on which it seemed they depended more than on any knowledge of localities; and he found that it had little plummets of lead set at intervals to steady it on the

ground. The necessities of this aid soon appeared still more strikingly, for the gallery, after descending to a great depth, began to wind as tortuously as if indeed traversing the bowels of the earth. The other inconveniences multiplied. Cold, damp, stinking blasts occasionally rushed past from the foul depths around; even and anon pieces of the sandy rock detached themselves, as if some skeleton were pushing a way from his sealed niche, or some malicious demon attempted to crush the passenger; the spectral cries multiplied to an infinite distance, until they reverberated in faint and mysterious whispers.

Alfonso was beginning to be surprised and alarmed at the great distance they had traversed in these galleries of death, when suddenly Fiamma paused, and turned with the full glare of her eyes and torch upon him.

“Your brow is damp, knight!” she said, almost with a tinge of contempt in her tone. “If your heart fails you, return; for we are now entering the place of ordeal, and you must remain alone and without light in these solitudes until the actors in the dismal pageantry arrive.”

“Be the hazard what it may, I am here to run it,” replied the knight. “I shall scarcely account any extremity to the flesh an evil which sets my soul at rest.”

“Let us on, then—those words should have been mine,” said Fiamma, continuing to advance, and the gallery gradually widened until it branched on each side of an arch hewn in the rock, which opened into a cavern originally formed in excavating the sand from among the rocks, the capricious beds of which, hollowed out, had left a huge chaotic chamber, wherein immeasurable galleries opened as into a centre. Many traces of human art appeared in the carved walls, and inscriptions deeply cut in the rocks which ages had not obliterated. The natural pillars of sandstone, left by the excavators, were sometimes rudely wrought with architectural ornaments, and the dust which covered the ground was so white and deep that it seemed as if strewed for ghosts to glide noiselessly over it.

“Yet 'tis a fearful theatre—perchance to stage a more fearful drama!” said the Colonna, exhibiting the interior of the cavern as far as her torch could illumine its vast recesses. “If legends lie not, the walls of these caverns sepulchre more dead than now breathe in Italy! Ay, and for the most part, murdered and mangled victims of the cruelty of man to man. This snowy dust is formed of their crumbled bones—these walls are crowded with their skeleton forms, which every falling splinter reveals to unhallowed gaze—for hither come sorcerers and witches to hold their black sabbaths, and delight their sovereign with the desecration of these holy solitudes. Hither will Cæsar come—a spirit as dark! But to see all unseen—hast thou the courage to ensconce thyself in yonder niche, over the arched entrance, whence thy retreat, guided by the ball in thy hand, is assured and easy?”

“It is very narrow—is it a sepulchre?” said the knight, with a shudder, and casting the light of the torch upwards to a narrow, but apparently deep dark opening in the pile of rocks over the entrance.

“What if it be?” returned Fiamma; “mark you not the half-effaced inscription: *Nil miseris vita!* What can we fear in death which existence suffers not?—But time shall not weary you much with his company until I return. Yonder passage leads, by a few windings, to the chapel where Cæsar and his sorcerer are to meet, the good monks believing them pilgrims, bound on a devotion to these shrines of martyrs—and they wait but the concerted signal from me.”

"Time! wherefore should he enter these abodes of the dead?" said Alfonso, still hesitatingly.

"To bid them be patient!—fifteen centuries have elapsed since yonder martyr's tomb was carved with that word: *Resurgam*," said Fiamma. "How many cycles of ages must he yet await the all-awakening trump?"

"This immense silence perchance answers," said Alfonso, after a pause, for even his courage faltered at the thought of remaining alone in these fearful solitudes. But the violence of the feeling which now possessed him against Lucrezia revived his determination. It was easy to mount to the sepulchre by the jutting of excavated rock; and taking care to secure his ball of silk, after a short survey he prepared to ascend. But suddenly the apprehension of treachery rushed so forcibly into his mind, that he paused, and turned to Fiamma with a look which expressed his suspicions so clearly that she understood him without words.

"Betray thee! and wherefore?" she exclaimed impatiently. "Thou wilt deem it is little for one so condemned to imprecate, — yet may this whole mountain overhead fall in and crush me, consciously, throughout all eternity, if I mean thee aught but good!"

This dreadful imprecation silenced the Hospitaller's scruples, and he ascended to the shrine in which it seemed he was to take up his point of observation. It had, apparently, from its depth, been excavated to contain a long file of corpses, placed upright, as was the frequent practice; and from the richness of its outward decorations had probably tempted the cupidity of some adventurer to break the marble closure away. If the sacrilege was rewarded with any spoil could not be guessed; but at all events nothing now remained but dust and darkness in the sepulchre, into which the knight entered backwards, for it would have been difficult to turn in so narrow a space, and he retreated some steps from the entrance, until Fiamma was satisfied that it was not possible to discern him from the floor of the cavern. Then waving her hand in farewell, with an expression of triumph kindling over her features, she hastened from the cavern by one of the galleries on the opposite side. Alfonso could not hinder himself from bending forward and watching the last glimmer up the gallery; then succeeded utter darkness, and a silence as unbroken as it sound was annihilated.

Thus abandoned to his meditations, his thoughts returned to muse with such anguish on the events transacting above ground that for some time he forgot his present situation, and the perils which might succeed in it. When at length the rapid shifting of thought brought him back to this consciousness, he started, and almost imagined himself in some wild dream; but the pressure of his prison walls convinced him of the reality of his dangerous position. The absence of Fiamma was already long, and as it lengthened on, terrible anticipations and fears assailed his imagination. The proverbial treachery of the Borgias, the horrible vengances to which they devoted their enemies, suggested to him that perhaps they had contrived for him the matchless horror of a living tomb in these vast labyrinths. Under the influence of this thought he dared not for several instants draw his silken lace, lest he should find that it was severed from the stake at the entrance of the cavities. In that case to retrace his way was scarcely possible, and to perish of starvation and despair was the probable alternative! But this apprehension grew more terrible than any certainty, and he plucked the ball convulsively—but the sharp jerk convinced him that his fear was unfounded; and before he had time to form

any more disastrous conjectures, light gleamed down a gallery whence he had not expected it, and voices were echoed in whispers down the walls, some time before the speakers appeared. And when they entered, their aspect was not calculated to dispel the sinister gloom of the solitude they disturbed.

The foremost was a personage enveloped in a long black mantle and mask, with a plumed hat slouched over it; another followed him who was garbed like a Spanish man-at-arms, his visage shaded by the long tattered hair which hung from under his morion. A third came, holding a torch, and apparently directing the advance of the two first by its light. He was an aged man, to judge by his stoop and his dragging gait, but was too completely enveloped in his garb of a Black Penitent to be more narrowly scrutinized. He leaned upon a long black wand, curiously inlaid with figures and stars, and carried on his humpy shoulders a scarlet sack, in which were probably some instruments of his art.

CHAPTER XLII.

A NIGHT IN THE CATACOMBS.

*“Hecate. O, well done! I commend your pains;
And every one shall share i’ the gains.”—Macbeth.*

“Methinks the holy air is wondrous musty, Dom Sabbat! yet it should be dry and warm, sithence we are descended nearly as deep as hell!” said the foremost, whose tone of lurid gaiety revealed him to be Cæsar Borgia. “How much deeper must we plunge ere the fiends are near enough to hear our evocations?”

“Signor, this place may serve the purpose: we can make the circle wide enough,” replied the necromancer, pausing, and in a voice which, however feeble and whistling with age, struck the Hospitaller as if he had heard it before. “But I must have assistance, and will summon two wise sisters of the art; we are ever willing to do each other turns of aid and kindness.”

Slightly withdrawing from his companions Dom Sabbat drew a sharp blue-gleaming knife from his bundle, pricked himself in the arm, and advanced towards a remote gallery in front, sprinkling little drops of his blood as he went, and uttering some strange words with great rapidity, in a raised tone, as if calling to some one in the distance. Numerous discordant and gibbering echoes answered, and suddenly there was heard a violent whirr of wind; after a pause, during which it increased, and seemingly hurried in upon it, two haggard old women came rushing down the gallery, and entered with their robes heaped up about them, full apparently of herbs, shrieking enviously, “We come, we come!”

“Leave mumbling to thy saints, Migueloto, or perchance thou wilt mar our spell,” said Cæsar, impatiently. “Look, man, they are thine old friends—the witches of the Ghetto.”

The sorceresses, greeting Cæsar with a fantastic bend, pointed their skinny fingers at the trembling castellan, and mowed and laughed in concert.

" Devils may not affright ye, hags, being your daily and nightly company," said Migneloto, angrily. " But an I had my way, ye should not laugh so soon after your granddaughter's mad prank had perilled us all."

" Peace, fool; the mothers were in no less hazard,—but the meddling monkish knight may live to rue it to his heart's core," said Cæsar gloomily. " And now, my potent Sabbat, since thy weird helpmates are here, wherefore dost thou pause and look at me?"

" Signor! I would clearly understand your will, which as yet you but dubiously hint," replied the *magus*, in a calm and confident tone.

" I have seen that thou hast power to raise the dead—for didst thou not show me Charlemagne in the magic mirror?" said Cæsar, with some unusual pauses of hesitation. " But now I would have thee summon me a spirit that will not need perchance so powerful a spell, for it is wandering still in some shadowy realm between this and the nothingness into which all things return—or the fixed eternity which priests avouch. Whatever it be, I would question it to learn what it would have to be at rest, and leave darkening my sunshine and thwarting me in all my ways!"

" What spirit, then, wouldest thou bid me summon, Cæsar?" replied the necromancer. " My spells have no power over the blessed; and some are damned even below adjurations which compel the fiends from the centre."

" The blessed!—nay, for he perished in mortal sin, and albeit loved by women, I do misdoubt me the greybeard Peter looks not on men's actions with their eyes," said Cæsar, after a moment's meditation. " Make thy circles, and utter thy spells, and I will tell thee anon whom I would behold!"

The necromancer took his staff, and made some mystic signs at three points of the cavern, muttering in some unknown language to himself; he then threw it forward, and it struck quivering in the sand, and to the affrighted eyes of the gazers for some instants resembled a fiery serpent coiling and hissing over the spot. The magician advanced, and taking his staff as the centre, drew a circle round it, partly linked in which he drew another of greater extent, with a pentacle in the midst, and a third of similar size to the first. He then commanded the assistant hags to trench the circles by casting up the sand with little brass shovels which they had brought, all the time pronouncing some Hebrew words which he taught them; and clapping their hands and shrilly exclaiming, " A master of the cabala! a master!" they set to work with great zeal and evident expectation of some portentous results, exchanging mysterious nods of satisfaction. In the operation of delving numerous fragments of bones and skulls turned up, which Sabbat seized and placed round the second circle.

" Tell me now, my son, whether the spirit we are to evoke was violently expelled from the carcass; and if so, when, and where?" said the necromancer, proceeding with his labours while Cæsar threw himself into a reclining position, as if wearied, on the ground, and watched his progress.

" What matters it to know this?" he replied, burying his hand in the sands, and seeming to divert himself by suffering it to squeeze through his fingers.

" To make the circle of capacity to resist the wrath of the spirit, which else might tear the questioner to pieces, or blast him with fire from hell," said Dom Sabbat.

" Hell's vassals are then as rebellious as those of the church," said

Cæsar, smiling darkly. "A violent death!—ay, such indeed it was; but these good dames can tell you how Francesco, Duke of Gandia, fell."

"He had dishonoured the pure blood of our father—pure from Enoch," said Notte, fiercely tossing back her matted grey hair as she glared up from her toils. Her sister, the grisly Morta, paused, too, and added with a bitter laugh, "But she was so beautiful, Notte!"

"But wherefore slain? thou, signor, didst not strike to avenge the blood of Enoch?" said Dom Sabbat.

"I was not born to be a younger brother!—his light made mine shadow! But thou hast heard tidings of this ere now!" returned Cæsar.

"Was there no other cause? No damning spot in thy brother's soul which we may use as a spell against the apparition's wrath?" said Dom Sabbat, with emphatic meaning.

"Yea, master; for it was my lord's urging of the justice of his brother's death in the guilt of his passion for Donna Lucrezia, which wrought me to work in it," said Migueloto, who beheld the preparations with increasing agitation.

"Peace, idiot! this is neither time nor place for those false mutterings which thou didst feign to believe in hope to cheat the devil, and murder with angelic approbation," interrupted Cæsar. "These tales were but mine own whispers echoed; and if Francesco's soul had no other stain than this imputed happiness, he were indeed beyond the power of your spells; what say ye? It was she, not I that murdered him—when she dared to complain to him of that moment's madness; and the puffed-up boy threatened me with his vengeance."

The necromancer's eyes gleamed fearfully through the holes in his black hood, and he resumed his labours muttering, "We must weave the spell thrice; for the injured have a power which their wrongers dream not!"

Not a word of this unconscious confession escaped the strained hearing of the Hospitaller.

While the hags delved a second trench round the circles the necromancer placed a low tripod in the first, upon which he set a brazen chafing-dish, kindled a fire beneath it, and from the herbs which the witches had brought, and many others in his own sack, selected the materials for a fumigation. Cæsar continued for some time apparently engaged in scanning the ornaments and sepulchral inscriptions of the subterraneous chapel, for as such many of the monuments attested that persecuted Christians of the first ages had used it.

"These ghosts of thine are like women, Dom Sabbat," he said at length, with wild levity. "They will come when not asked, and when asked will none of it."

"The spirit may have power given it to withstand my spell, wherein I am not to blame," replied the necromancer. "As yet I have not uttered it—but time is at hand! Sisters, sit in the first circle, and repeat the names I must pronounce; but wherefore trembles this soldier? The spirit will appear only to its murderer, if at all."

"We had all a share in the work; let us all behold it! I hate the Nazarene still!" grined Morta between her numerous and fang-like teeth.

"Why, so do I! I hate him, and fear him not," said Cæsar, springing up on his feet. "Dastard! he was my brother, yet thou seest I do not quiver in a nerve!"

"Beware that thou utter no prayer, or we are all at the mercy of the

fiends ! said Dom Sabbat, gazing at the pallid captain of Santangelo, whose teeth chattered audibly. "Enter the circle, if thou wouldest be safe, and fear not—until thine hour comes ! Duke Cæsar, thy station is within the pentacle of the second circle."

Migueloto mechanically obeyed the directions of the sorcerer, while Cæsar advanced boldly, leaped into the pentacle, and stood with folded arms in a resolved or perhaps sceptical attitude. The sage then returned to the foremost circle, which he alone occupied, knelt, and took a curious volume of oriental manuscript, illuminated with magic figures and signs, from his breast, and taking the only torch which they had brought, he thrust it into the sand and extinguished it.

The little light which remained was furnished from the livid flames which burned under the sorcerer's chafing-dish, from which Alfonso perceived that there arose a thick dark smoke, full of some strange perfume. With all the reasons which he had to suspect some fraud in the necromancer's exhibition, so strong and general was the belief in the marvels of sorcery, that he gazed with all the horror and fascination which the expectation of beholding an inhabitant of the vast unknown might well occasion. But, despite the horror which Cæsar's crimes necessarily excited, there was something sublime in the fixed and unquailing courage with which he seemed to await the issue of the terrific experiment. Perhaps the feeling which supported him was akin to that of a man stretching forth a diseased limb to be amputated, because it is the only means of deliverance from an intolerable and induring anguish, for he murmured several times, half unconsciously and aloud, "Let it take some form—albeit but that darkness—and I will not fear it !"

"Silence, silence ! the sisters give not due responses, for they hear not my words !" said the necromancer angrily, and continuing to read from his book in a language which was unknown to all but himself and the hags. The Hospitaller's incredulity was soon shaken. Mutterings as if of thunder sounded remotely among the galleries, and seemed to be approaching nearer and nearer. Fiery hieroglyphics ran along the sandy earth and the sepulchral walls of the cavern, while the necromancer calmly read on without raising his eyes, and the witches continued their chaunt in mingled terror and enthusiasm until it rose like the shrieking of sea birds in a storm.

Suddenly the brazier began to sparkle and hiss, and seemed to bubble over with coloured serpents and flames. A deadly mephitic odour filled the cavern, which produced a strange and swooning languor even in Alfonso, although removed from its immediate action. The feeling was brief, but it left a kind of dreamy intoxication on the senses, so that when, raising his eyes from the group, he saw what seemed to be legions of hideous spectres and demons of the most grotesque and horrible forms crowding into the cavern, and flitting up and down the walls, he gazed with the strange imperturbability with which we look on the direst phantasmagoria of sleep. The majority of these apparitions made gestures of disdain, or mouthed contemptuously at the silent tenants of the circles.

"It is in vain : they spurn our offerings : nothing is acceptable to them but the newly shed blood of children and virgins !" muttered Dom Sabbat, in a low and disappointed tone. "They will not answer. Hags, adjure your father, the cruel and aged sorcerer, to aid us, for he is surely among these demons !"

"'Tis false !" shrieked Morta, in spite of the terror which shook her withered carcass. "These have not the countenances of the children of

our tribes ; and he ever loathed thine worse than the plague, living, and will not consort with them, dead!"

"More mandragora ! hark at its pleasant shrieks ! Surely we lack some potent ingredient," said Dom Sabbat, hurriedly. "The sweat of a murderer's right hand in the flames !—Yet if these are spirits we have spells more persuasive than the material unctions of the grave ! Speak, Cæsar ! remind them of all the direst deeds by which thou hast merited their aid and favour. Speak, or I have no longer power to detain them, or compel submission.

"By the passion which consumes my soul ! by the spouse of Christ whom I won from His altars ! by the dire curse of Sultan Zem ! by the blood of my brother !" exclaimed Cæsar ; and observing that the spectral hosts gradually waned away, he added still more frantically, "Nay, then, demons, spirits, whatever ye are, hear me, for ye shall hear me ! If the Church of God be hateful to ye—by the damning calumnies I have breathed against its head ! suffer this spirit I demand to appear before me !"

A moment of profound and awful silence followed, and then an universal shriek arose from all the gazers, even from the necromancer himself, excepting Cæsar, who stood fixed and immovable as a figure carved in ebony—for a pale and ghastly blue light gleamed down the gallery in the opposite wall of the cavern, and a darkness appeared in it whose presence chilled the life-blood in Alfonso's veins. And yet there was no precise outline of form or feature ; vague hues of armour, and of a mantle and rich surcoat deeply stained with gore and the green ooze of corruption ; some ghastly indistinctness of a visage and waving plumes, —was all that was discernible.

"Demon or angel, or whatever thou art !" gasped Cæsar at length, while the necromancer glared as if petrified at the horror he had himself raised, and Migueloto sank senseless on the sand. "Yea, yea, for it is he ! even as we left him in the vaults of Santa Maria !—Francesco ! brother ! —no, brother I will not call thee," he continued in the tones of a madman raving in his cell. "Stay, speak ! or my soul must burst in its silence !—Speak ! if because thou wert slain in mortal sin—in the arms of one of the accursed tribes—thy soul cannot win rest, and torments me thus ! if it be thy hell to make mine ! Oh, speak, and say what penance, what prayer, what masses numberless, can win me forgiveness and thee peace !"

There was a silence.

"Cæsar !" replied a low unearthly voice, which sounded as if from the depths of the grave, and yet in tones of supernatural sweetness and sorrow, not unmixed with compassion.

"Oh, I am here !" shrieked the maddening fratricide.

"Cast off those robes to wear which thou hast emulated Cain the first murderer !—resume thy priestly habit ; bestow thy sister on whomsoever her love shall choose, were he the meanest of thy serfs : wear out thy days in penance and prayer and holy works, and in perpetual labour to obliterate and refute the hideous calumnies thy villainy has spread !—and heaven may yet be merciful !"

"Never, never, never, fiend ! thou but assumest his gentle form to torture me !" raved Cæsar. "Bid me, if thou wilt, when I am master of Italy, redeem the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of the infidels, or perish in the enterprise !—endow temples to pray for thy unpeacefully parted soul. Nay, do thy worst, destroy, if thou canst ! I defy thee. Boy, that

wert so loved and beautiful! spirit, though thou art! yea, I will torture thee, too. Thy darkness—yea, let it be present—when the crown of the ancient Cæsar is set upon my brow—and when Lucrezia sits throned my empress beside me in the majesty of her supreme beauty, and all the earth, I care not whether in love or fear, shouts ‘Well done! well done!’” But even as he concluded the words with frantic defiance and exultation, the apparition disappeared in supervenient darkness with a long and melancholy shriek which sounded like a farewell to all hope.

The dead red light of the brazier now reappeared which the supernatural glare had darkened; and Alfonso, half senseless as he himself remained, felt that a long silence ensued.

“Dom Sabbat!” at length exclaimed the voice of Cæsar, in a wondrously fixed and firm tone; “let us have light. This is strange jugglery!—didst thou hear what the devil said in that fair disguise?”

“Cæsar! listen to me; it is a true spirit thou hast beheld,” gasped the necromancer. “My spells could not raise it. It is a spirit sent from heaven to warn thee to repentance; and I adjure thee, as thou livest, and must live for ever, repent, and save thy soul from the burning grasp which is upon it.”

“This is goodly advise from thee, Dom Sabbat,” exclaimed Cæsar, with a wild laugh. “Repent!—turn monk and mumbler of masses! Give Lucrezia to the arms of the first beggar who wins her woman’s liking!—to the hot Englishman, perchance—or the frosty spy of Ferrara? Away!—hast thou forgotten that thyself didst show me the descendants of Lucrezia all crowned, and with wreaths which made those of the Cæsars dim?”

“I remember!” groaned the magus.

“Then art thou answered,” said Cæsar, gaspingly. “Yet, once again let me tax the powers of thy so mighty art. Command thy spirits to show me the form of him whom Lucrezia loves—or shall love;—that in obeying the spirit’s behest we may not mistake our bridegroom.”

“It is in vain; the fiends are weary, and will no longer obey my spells,” said the necromancer, drawing himself slowly up, and gazing with convulsive shudders around him. For the first time the listening Hospitalter noticed the extraordinary change in the tones of his voice, which were now deep, melancholy, and musical, and strongly reminded him of those of Fra Bruno.

“I say, they will—they shall, pronounce the words; I will echo thee,” returned Cæsar, with mad velocity. “Ask only if it be a vowed Knight of St. John. And yet it cannot be.—Did she not attempt to poison him on the day of the tourney?”

“My lord, no! I can certify thee to the contrary, who prepared the draught for a rival who desired his shame in that fatal show!” exclaimed Dom Sabbat, panting. “But urge me not to this task. The reluctant spirits will not obey but on words which will shake the mountain above us.”

“Shake the universe, if thou wilt, but let my soul be satisfied!” ejaculated Cæsar.

“Back to thy pentacle, or the fiends will seize the instant to tear thine heart out!” said Sabbat, as Cæsar strode forward in his eagerness. “I will do what I may—but they will not listen to me.”

Cæsar obeyed, wiping the dark sweat from his brows with both his hands in a stream; and the necromancer resumed his spells, but with

seeming feebleness and reluctance. Even Cæsar's agonizing anxiety was now amply shared by the Knight of St. John. He forgot every restraint of prudence in his eagerness, and stepped altogether out of his concealment to gaze. It is true that the cavern was nearly in complete darkness, for the brazier threw only a narrow circular light around its tripod, revealing the bending figure of the sorcerer, and touching the edges of the duke's garment and the tip of his plume with a fiery red. But most unluckily and suddenly a bright light shot up from the brazier, and streamed a strong reflection on the figure of the Hospitaller. The Jewesses, who had turned their heads away in terror from the spectral presence, beheld him, and uttering a simultaneous shriek, Cæsar and the necromancer both started round—and clearly discerned him for an instant ere he precipitately retired. He remembered afterwards that Cæsar nodded to him as if in pleased and sarcastic recognition, while Sabbat, uttering a groan of unutterable anguish, sank on the earth.

An instant's intense listening convinced Alfonso that no suspicion of his corporeal presence had crossed the fear-struck imaginations of the spectators. Cæsar stepped from his pentacle into the magician's circle, and raised the necromancer with an exclamation which sounded more like one of contempt than of pity. But suddenly a new and fatal project occurred to the ever-restless thoughts of the Borgia. "Migueloto," he said, "after what we have seen to-night Sabbat's visage cannot affright us, though it be the fiend's; but happen what may, I will see it now at last. His faintness needs air." And drawing his dagger with the word, he cut the girdle of the Black Penitent, and tearing his hood open uttered a loud cry as the countenance beneath was revealed—"Fra Bruno!"

After a pause of amazement which for a time deprived the gazers of all power of movement, Cæsar burst into a frantic peal of laughter which rung far and near through the galleries; and clutching his brows as if he imagined his intellect to be wavering, he gazed steadfastly and incredulously at the friar's visage.

"Migueloto, is this some jeer of the fiend, or art thou a traitor?" he exclaimed at length, suddenly clutching the castellan by the throat.

"My lord! and as I live, I know not by what miracle—if this be Friar Bruno—he is out of Santangelo," said Migueloto.

"We will learn by the manner of his return; yet men have long deemed the monk, too, a sorcerer," said Cæsar, musingly. "And 'tis strange what suspicions have at times crossed me, which all come thronging back upon me now. Let none feign to have seen him; extinguish the fire; we must have his guidance out of these labyrinths, or we may wait long for any other."

Strong convulsions announced the sorcerer's return to sensation, and Cæsar kicking over the brazier extinguished the last gleam of light; then he raised Sabbat and adjusted his hood, while he seemed engaged in endeavouring to loosen it. It is probable that Sabbat's first use of his restored sense was to baffle this attention, but the Hospitaller only distinguished that he uttered some incoherent thanks; and after a short consultation, and gropings in the dark for some of the books and instruments of his unlawful art, it seemed that he resumed his office of guide, and the whole evil company trooped off in his train.

It was not until the last echo of their footsteps died away, and silence had for some time succeeded, that Alfonso recovered from the overwhelming confusion of his thoughts, and remembered his own situation. Lu-

crezia, innocent of all the direful crimes imputed to her! for a brief moment all the powers of his soul were absorbed in the thrice-blessed conviction. Lucrezia, the paramour of Sir Reginald! rolled back the whole tide of happiness almost as instantly. The memory of her former love for himself—of the splendid promises affixed to its possession—nigh overwhelmed him. He rushed from his concealment, as if he hoped to be yet in time to tear her from his rival's arms, from ineffaceable dishonour; and it was not until he had reached the floor of the subterraneous chapel that he recollects his ball of silk, and found that he had dropped it in the precipitation of his retreat from the gaze of the necromancers!

In the first horror of this discovery every other thought was confounded. He remounted with wild velocity to the place of his concealment, and groped on his hands and knees until even the obstinacy of hope was subdued, in a vain search for the ball. He then concluded that it had jerked down into the cavern, and he spent a long time as fruitlessly feeling over the sand within any possible limit, forgetful of all things else in heaven and earth but that single little twist of silk. At last the want of light struck him as being the only reason why he cou'd not find the clue; and remembering the brazier, he staggered forward, as he imagined, to the scene of the magic operation, staring into the thick darkness in search of the least gleam or spark. But Cæsar had too well extinguished all, and save those which burst from his own strained eyeballs no glimpse of the comfortable element appeared. Convinced that all his researches were in vain, he endeavoured to persuade himself that it was easy to return by the way he came; and turning, he hastened on in a straight direction, as he imagined, until suddenly the passage became so narrow that he could no longer force himself along without pressing against the wall on both sides—a thing which he remembered had not happened to him in his advance. All minor fears now vanished in the overwhelming thought that he was perhaps entangled beyond extrication in these black windings of the earth—buried alive!—and the Hospitaller pushed his way back, calling for assistance at the loudest pitch of his voice. The innumerable and awful echoes of the city of the dead replied—but no sound of rational intelligence.

Still he found himself in a wider space, and although the darkness was too thick to discern any object, the thought struck Alfonso that if he could, by groping, distinguish the archway at which he had entered the cavern, it might guide him in retracing his way, or he might possibly find the ball, which could not run very far after its descent to the ground from his hiding-place. How long he consumed in these researches he knew not, nor calculated, groping along the rocky walls, and meeting with many openings, but none so wide, or of a different form, from that which he sought; and, moreover, he was convinced at length that he was not in the sepulchral chapel, but pursuing the course of a long gallery. Then he remembered that the learned Benbo once in his father's court, speaking of these caverns, declared he had read in some ancient record that they extended as far as Ostia, a distance of twenty miles, and were so infinitely perplexed and winding that it was scarcely possible to hit on the proper way through them.

Learning seldom presented herself in a more terrible guise, and in the despair of the instant Alfonso clutched his dagger to assure himself that he had yet a means of escape from the horrors of the fate which awaited him. Then again, strung with the energy of despair, he pushed recklessly

forward, persuading himself that Bembo's stories were a poet's legends to make men marvel, and that if he pursued his course in a direct line he could not fail to come to some outlet. On he went, strengthened by finding that the ground beneath his feet ascended as if to the upper world; but after pursuing the way to a considerable distance, he suddenly came with a shock against hard and solid rock, which barred all farther progress.

For some moments, delirious with mental agony, he laboured to persuade himself that all he had seen and heard was a dream; and in truth the wild, incongruous and horrible events which he had witnessed in so rapid a phantasmagoria, favoured the supposition. He laughed aloud at the irrational idea that he could have been induced to incur so fearful a risk on the vague persuasions and assurances of the Borgia's paramour; he persuaded himself that he had put into the mouth of a phantom Cæsar the shapings of the suspicions which had long floated in his own mind; and the terrific visitant from the unknown world, in its vague and misty horrors, was an attempt of the imagination to picture to itself the form of the unhappy Duke of Gandia. The metamorphosis of the aged sorcerer into Fra Bruno was surely a feat in a wild dream; and the total and unaccountable disappearance of Fiamma from the scene in which she seemed to be a necessary part; the whole circumstance of the magic vision; the beldames' arrival on a whirlwind; the demons and grinning phantoms—were all but parts of a hideous illusion! But when he strove to awaken himself, the irresistible evidence of the senses compelled him to belief in the reality of the horrors which encircled him. He felt that his powers of body and mind were alike deserting him; his ideas rushed together and passed through his brain in confused whirls; his heart beat with the strokes of a hammer against his ribs; thick dews streamed from his visage; he staggered a few steps back from the rocky bar, and reanimating himself with a desperate effort, essayed to run back the distance he had come, when suddenly he heard a loud crash and rumble of fragments of stone and sand around him—it seemed as if the earth were sinking in above him—all thought and recollection vanished, and a deathly lethargy came over him in which he sank on the ground.

How long this stupor lasted he knew not, but he awoke with a fearful start, and found his limbs nearly all benumbed, and a fiery thirst consuming his vitals. He gaped, and found his tongue and throat stiff with dust; but it was some time before he had any clear recollection of his position, raising himself with difficulty, and staring wildly around in the darkness. At first, indeed, he had a confused and half-frenzied persuasion that he had been mortally wounded in a conflict with Sir Reginald le Beaufort, and that he was about to make a last effort to tear Lucrezia from his arms; but when what had really happened came pouring back in disordered visions on his memory, he laid himself down again, and endeavoured to compose himself with the belief that a fearful dream still haunted his waking thoughts. But the stony fragments on which he lay, and the rank smell which saluted his nostrils, startled him up again; and the instantaneous and clear conviction which returned upon him brought with it a shock which must have overwhelmed any reason less firmly poised.

His natural courage and the instinct of self-preservation revived the Hospitaller's dormant energies; and now a thought stirred up his soul which might have breathed life into death itself, in the burning contrast

which his imagination presented of his own situation and that of his rival. The horrors of the doom which awaited himself found an inexplicable parallel in the as overwhelming delights and triumph in which Sir Reginald revelled; the darkness and terrors of his living tomb marvellously recalled the clearest and most alluring visions of the bright, blooming earth above, —the blue heavens—the glory of the sun! The glimpses of the dismal phantom of death, which crossed his imagination almost visually, were strangely accompanied by the beauteous form of Lucrezia, more richly tinted with the shame and rapture of her guilty joys, and yet matchless in the effulgence and allurement of her charms. A mad desire for revenge superseded even the thirst for life and air; or rather life appeared to the Hospitaller to mean only the satisfaction of his vengeance.

In this frenzy his strength returned, and he groped eagerly forward to retrace the way which he remembered he had wandered into, when suddenly he encountered resistance, and felt heaps of crumbling materials which gave way as he touched them. The recollection of the noise and fall he had heard instantly occurred to him, and with an agony deeper than all he had yet felt the thought rushed upon him that the rock and sand had fallen in behind him, and for ever barred all exit. Every effort which he made confirmed this dismal thought, and then indeed did he yell and shriek until it seemed as if his cries must pierce the solid earth, and reach some helpful ear. Again and again did he pause in utter exhaustion, and renew his cries, and superstition now contributed her aid to the destruction of the victim. His attempts to overwhelm the pontiff with ignominy had, he imagined, brought down the wrath of heaven upon him, and that his escape was cut off by supernatural agency. For a time he yielded to this tremendous thought, and changed all his efforts into the most fervent supplication for mercy or immediate destruction, and vehement prayers to the unnumbered martyrs whose bones tenanted the immense sepulchre, for intercession.

The hollow echoes which returned his voice from above, at first reanimated him with the frantic hope that supernatural things heard and repeated to each other the utterings of his despair, but gradually suggested a more rational thought to him. Remembering the great height of some of the excavations, and the yawning fissures which he had observed in the galleries, the hope flashed upon him that he might climb to some exit, since all was denied him below. He tossed his arms on high, and no roofing met them; yet for several minutes he dared not attempt to ascertain by experience the fallacy or assurance of his last hope. But the agony of doubt grew insupportable; and he raised himself by pressing against the narrow walls, husbanding every inch which stood between him and despair. He continued to draw himself up with convulsive vibrations, and oh, the ecstasy! the rift gradually widened, until at length the broad breast of the Hospitaller heaved freely, and he was compelled to mount by pressing with his feet and back against the dividing walls. A few instants more, and his feet found not resistance but the sharp edge of the excavation, and with a rapture which swelled his heart almost to bursting he leaped forth into an open space.

Groping his way in utter darkness, still Alfonso felt that there was no hope but in endeavouring to explore some exit, at whatever risk. On he went, unconscious whether every step he took was not leading him further to destruction, scarcely able to breathe in the slab and stagnant air, which seemed as thick with mephitic vapours as if it were the mouldiness which clothed the numberless carcasses of the dead. Still he would not yield;

still he hurried distractedly on, until vanquished with fatigue and despair, scarcely able to drag his limbs along, he paused to rest for an instant, and in that instant heard the barking of a dog.

All his energies returned as if with an infusion of new blood; he rushed on, as nearly as he could guess, in the direction whence he had heard the barking of the dog, and which fortunately continued at intervals, as if the animal scented him. In a short time he perceived a faint brightness, low, but of very considerable breadth. Rocky fragments, touched with a fiery glow, appeared at some distance before him, and thence the barking of the dog most certainly came. Continuing his advance, he perceived that he was in an excavation which gradually decreased in height, until it formed a jagged opening like the gaping valves of an oyster, through which the light was visible. He was obliged to crawl on his hands and knees to the fissure, and found that it was at some height in the rocks of a cavern below, in which were several groups of men sleeping round a fire, while the dog, finding his efforts to arouse them useless, stood growling and glaring upward. The Hospitaller was about to call for assistance, when fortunately one of the sleepers raised his head, and exclaimed, "Down, beast, and the curse of Saint Antony upon thee!" in the fierce tones of John of the Catacombs.

Alfonso was aware that he had little favour to expect from the hands of this ruffian, and the personages associated with him were of his own class, though some of them were garbed as soldiers and peasants, mingled with one or two deformed beggars whom he remembered to have seen crawling about the streets, and on the steps of churches. Nearly all these fellows were armed with some instrument of offence; cross-bows, daggers, bucklers of steel and bulls' hides, which they used as pillows, lay all about. Creature comforts were not neglected; fragments of a roasted kid, eggshells, and chestnuts, with several goatskins of wine, were visible in a kind of cupboard formed by a projection of the rocks.

The danger of trusting himself to the mercy of these banditti was obvious and considering that they probably went early abroad on their predatory occupations, Alfonso resolved to await the result. He perceived that it would not be difficult to descend into the cavern, the stones in its sandy walls forming a flight of natural though very irregular stairs; and it was certain that the robbers would have some easy access to their place of refuge. Calmed with this hope he imitated his friend, the dog, which crouched in submission to its master's command, still glowering uneasily and watchfully upward. He lay down, and endeavoured to compose the direful agitation of his blood and spirits; but recollection on recollection came heaving them into wilder tumults, and the events of the last few hours, in which seemed crowded the thoughts and sufferings of years, rushed back with almost visual distinctness. But all that he had endured of physical agony was little compared with the mental frenzy with which he remembered the obstacle which, when every other was removed, had arisen between his passion and Lucrezia. The identity of Fra Bruno with the necromancer had indeed excited his suspicions that some imposture had been played in the fearful phantasmagoria he had witnessed, or that the result had not answered the plans of the contrivers; but in nowise invalidated the unconscious testimony of Caesar to his sister's innocence. And yet, at this very hour, the jealous imagination of the Hospitaller suggested scenes of the voluptuous triumphs of his young rival more richly coloured and resplendent than ever Ovid dreamed in his warmest mood,

and in which the recollections of the cave of Egeria remorselessly aided. Every perfection of her loveliness which his doating fancies had often dwelt upon in unobserved but most passionate contemplation, his fancy—like a painter skilled by long practice—threw into forms which made his soul sicken with hatred and the thirst of revenge, even in contemplating its own limnings. And yet so utter was his physical prostration that he sank at length into a sleep, tormented by dreams, which, strangely enough, related but slightly to his recent sufferings. Once indeed he imagined that he was a living soul fixed in a marble statue, incapable of all movement, and doomed to remain so for ever; but when he awoke at length, panting and struggling for breath, it was because he dreamed he looked down a precipice, and saw Lucrezia and Sir Reginald asleep on a bank of roses at the base, with the bright cheek of Lucrezia resting bloomily on her lover's shoulder. Perhaps it was in reality the sound of voices which broke this painful vision, for the moment he awoke he distinguished that of John of the Catacombs.

The worthy was apparently commenting on the strange barking of his dog in the night. "I shall not take Cerbero with me to-day, for I misdoubt some colony of rats is scenting us out," he said. "I should not marvel to see some hundreds of them come pouring down the rocks there, for Heaven knows what is within that yawning mouth with its ill-set teeth! So I shall leave him loose, and bring him a bull's heart for his supper."

This was said to the only second person who remained in the cave, another bravo, who was busied in sharpening a stiletto on his leather sandals, and who nodded assent without looking up. Alfonso resigned himself to wait until these lingerers should also be pleased to depart; and at last the longed-for minute came. Poor Cerbero seemed the only one discontented with the arrangement, perhaps from a presentiment of his fate. He made several ineffectual attempts to follow his brutal master, who spurned him back, and finally kicked him severely to make him understand his pleasure that he should remain on guard against the rats. The animal at last submitted, and stood looking long and wistfully after his master as he retired up a sand-walk which probably led to the open air. The creature then began dejectedly to lick its flanks, occasionally pausing to listen as if it still heard the distant footsteps.

Alfonso confided in the auscultation of the hound, a large wolf dog of a noble species; and it was not until it stretched itself hopelessly down that he ventured on his descent. His first movement startled the dog, but when he thrust his body half through the cleft in the rock, it gave a fierce yell, and sprang so high in the air at him that he became aware of a new and very formidable opponent. The danger grew imminent, for, finding his spring had failed, Cerbero began scrambling up the rocks to get at his visitor; and feeling the peril of awaiting the attack in his narrow confinement, Alfonso drew his dagger, and thrust himself wholly out. In an instant Cerbero, who had reached the rock below, sprang at him, and in the next fell with the weapon buried in its throat to the ground, without a single howl or struggle.

There was no great difficulty in the rest of the enterprise. The gallery was straight, and ended in an excavation so nearly choked with briars and bushes, that only those familiar with the haunt perceived a way into it by creeping beneath the matted foliage. The open Campagna was beyond, and in a few moments Alfonso was standing in the sun, dizzy and drunk with joy and the exhaustion of his night of agouies.

CHAPTER XLIII.

“ Such rage inflames the wolf’s wild heart and eyes,
Robbed as he thinks, unjustly, of his prize.”—COWLEY.

It was brightening into the dawn which followed that perilous night, and the first faint glimmer which entered the chamber of tortures in Sant’angelo lighted the livid and passion-gleaming visage of Cæsar Borgia.

He was in earnest discourse with Fiamma Colonna, who, seated on an instrument of torture resembling a cross, with joints and steel screws, was calmly reasoning against a suspicion, which it seemed had caused this early visit, that the superstitious castellan suffered Fra Bruno to wander from his captivity at pleasure.

“ Nay, with mine own eyes I have beheld him!” he exclaimed, impatiently interrupting her. “ I watched him home to Santangelo, and I will know who gives him means to spread his seditions abroad, since Migueloto, thou sayest, truly denies all part in it, or the rack on which thou leanest shall fail for the first time!”

Fiamma smiled disdainfully at the cruel instrument, and replied carelessly, “ Are men to be so subdued, by fleshly torments merely?”

“ And dost thou feign that thy female sinews might not shrink in the ordeal?” returned Cæsar, with a strange glare.

“ I have a torture within which mocks at all things of fear and anguish!” replied Fiamma; and the door opening as she spoke, admitted Migueloto with his prisoner, Fra Bruno.

“ Your pardon, father, to have disturbed your rest ere cockerow, the student’s hour,” said Cæsar, gravely. “ For I doubt not it was disturbed —ha, Migueloto?”

“ I found the father at his devotion,” replied the castellan, reverently.

“ I will not long interrupt it, if my questions are as frankly answered as they shall be put,” said Cæsar. “ Tell me, good friar, art thou not the monk whom in my schoolboy days I beheld with Savonarola, when I waited in the antichamber at Florence for an audience with Pier de’ Medici?”

“ Even so;—and him to whom you said—‘ When I am Emperor of Rome I will aid ye to reduce the church back to the most apostolic poverty and vassallage which your dreams can shape,’ ” replied the Dominican, after a moment’s pause.

“ Thou rememberest then that boyish gibes?” said Cæsar, musingly.

“ And thou hast, meseems, remembered it, too?” replied Fra Bruno, calmly.

“ Nay, I forget it not;—and the time of fulfilment may be nearer at hand than many of us deem,” said Cæsar. “ And whom could heaven more worthily entrust with such a task, than thee, its saint and martyr? I owe thee a priceless favour, moreover, and I know it. It was thou who released thy penitent Dom Sabbat from vows, and suffered him to aid me in a work which I have much at heart?”

“ It was I who suffered him to aid thee in a work which I have much at heart, of which thou art the destined although blind instrument,” replied the monk calmly. “ I did not think to obtain so early a moment,

and yet I was praying for the earliest, when I was summoned—to release myself from every bond of the flesh, and commence at length the pre-destined toil. It was I who suffered Dom Sabbat to juggle thee with a false show of an apparition in the catacombs—that I might make thee, as I tell thee now thou art—utterly desperate! if it can make thee so to be assured that the plaintive tones which imitated in their sepulchral feebleness the voice of thy departed victim, came from the heart of thy sister, Lucrezia!"

"Monk! what ravest thou?" exclaimed Fiamma, with a gesture full of warning and terror.

"Truths which the rack could not extort from me, lady, and therefore fear not," replied Fra Bruno. "Yes, Duke of Romagna! Lucrezia Borgia was audience to thy confession, wrung from thee by thine own guilt and a conjurer's trick. Henceforth thou art at her mercy, and since thou darest not destroy whom she loves—since the devil that haunts thee will not suffer thee to harm herself—thou hast but one resource—to destroy the power which makes her direful to thee—to root out the simony of Roderic Borgia!"

"Monk! demon!—it cannot be but that I dream!" said Cæsar gasping for breath, and tossing back his dabbled hair from his brow. "I lose my clutch on destiny!—And can it indeed be that the magus Sabbat was but a base spy, an impostor bribed to betray?"

"Nay, but one whose doings are all fated and marked, who even while he cheated thee with a magic play received himself an open and signal assurance of supernatural approbation, when a mumbled spell, which meant he knew not what, convinced him, by raising the phantom of the Knight of St. John, that his suspicions were true, and that it was he whom Lucrezia loved," returned the Dominican.

"Thou hast early intelligence, Fra Bruno!" exclaimed Cæsar, whose agitation bathed his brows in continual rushes of cold sweat, and shook his frame with the convulsive starts and shiverings of an ague. "If this be true, either thou hast accomplices among ourselves, or art thou too a sorcerer? Art thou Sabbat himself? Familiar of hell! I know it, for I beheld thine accursed visage in thy dastard swoon in the catacombs!"

"Then mightst thou have spared thyself the pains to ask," replied the unmoved monk.

"Whence hast thou thy daring? from heaven or from hell?—But I will know or ere we part!" said Cæsar, furiously. "Confess! who set thee on to act this strange and persevering part which thou hast played, stirring first the fire in my soul with thy visions and prophecies. Confess! or—I will find a way to make thee."

"Bring your tortures; in turns essay your racks, your burning irons; the wild beast's fang; boiling oils, and molten lead; or altogether!—thou canst not harm me," replied Fra Bruno. "I am calm now. I have obeyed the voice. And for my reward, I know that she cannot consummate her guilt, and that your hellish brood must henceforth toil at each other's destruction!—nor have any ways of death more power over me than is given to them!"

"Thou art made of the stuff I need in my designs—and were the moment ripe!" ejaculated Cæsar, his desperate thoughts gleaming madly at his eyes. "But I will use no torture on thee if thou wilt avow by what means thou art wont to leave this castle, and hast effected this impossibility of which thou ravest?"

“Use your tortures, then; I am all marble to endure rather than answer aught on these questions, Borgia!” returned the monk.

“Cæsar! whether from the angels or the fiends, thyself hast seen that the friar hath marvellous powers,” said Fiamma, amazed at the Dominican’s dangerous revelation.

“Why, then, it was an angel that I beheld open the secret entrance into Adrian’s tomb!—yea, for it wore thy form!” said Cæsar, suddenly clutching her hand, gazing fiercely at her, and then dashing it away with violence. “Thou, too—thou, too, hast betrayed me. I see all now! Thy friend and ally, the envoy of Ferrara—it was no phantom!—he too was there—in the catacombs—and by thy connivance! Thou wert the masked Venetian that visited him! But I am not so lost as ye all deem; I have provided against even this stroke of treason and all ingratitude.”

“Treason and ingratitude!—monster! that would have saved thee by dispersing the darkness thou hast raised round thy sister’s name, and inducing the noble envoy of Ferrara to remove her from thy fatal presence as his master’s bride!” said Fiamma, starting up, and standing before Cæsar in an attitude of wild and utter defiance.

“We shall learn this anon,” returned Cæsar, flashing his fiery eyes, which now burned with diabolical and frenzied brilliancy on Fiamma, but her desperation had passed all fear.

“Yea, I was the masked Venetian whom thy spies observed,” she continued. “And what art thou? What art thou, Cain! What art thou, fratricide, seducer, destroyer!—If all thy crimes obtain their just revenges, the fiend himself must abdicate his tortures to thee!—But do thy worst on me; I smile to think that at least thy sister—aha! thy sister!—is warned of all thy cruelties, and beyond thy craft to destroy.”

There was a long and dreadful silence, during which Cæsar gazed steadfastly at his prisoners.

“Lead them away!”—he said at length to Migueloto, staring as if from a dream. “My brain is on fire!—and since their madness laughs at these paltry tortures around us, I will devise others. Bear them away, Migueloto!—magic indeed shall they use if either leave these walls again alive!”

“Farewell, then!—but, nay, it should be here—there were a justice in it which might comfort—an expiation to perish by thy hand!” said Fiamma, sinking suddenly from her fury. “Kill me here, Cæsar! I can die as calmly by thy hand as a lamb that has been trained by the butcher follows him to the slaughter-house.”

“And therefore thou shalt not,” raged the Borgia. “Away with them—to the dungeons beneath the ramparts!”

Migueloto hurriedly obeyed; and returning in an excess of perturbation which kept his whole frame at an aspen tremble, he found Cæsar so lost in thought that it was several minutes ere he noticed his entry.

“My lord!—and is all lost?” he said at length in a hollow whisper.

“Lost! what is lost!—She only knows what she has ever suspected, but she dares not have betrayed me to Alexander!” he exclaimed, noticing the words, but scarcely the speaker. “Away! nothing is lost while I remain to myself. She will reserve it as a spell to guard her beloved, as she deems—a spell of terror. Or dost thou deem we were not already in Alexander’s dungeons? Why, if he believed and knew this tale, with his own hand would he avenge his darling fair-haired boy, even in the heart of him whom scandal also calls his son!”

"My lord!"

"But I tell thee all goes well—I have already foiled them all, and accomplished all my purposes," continued Cæsar, with a kind of delirious vivacity. "Fear not the alliance with Ferrara—it is turned to air! And now I need but proof of the Orsini plottings to force them to give me the lever with which I will lift the world! And who dost thou think shall be my testimony? Even their confidant and Paolo's right hand, the stainless English knight. Thou thinkest that I rave, and deem so, for awhile."

"If we could learn all we have to fear, my lord—from the prisoners," said Migueloto, glancing plaintively round the instruments of torture.

"Thou art mistaken, Catalan; these tortures cannot move them in their present frenzy," said Cæsar, hurriedly. "Nor methinks—I know not why, but even her fierce spirit against me kindles me with—I know not what—but I would not have her fine limbs marred and shattered with these wrenching pangs."

"Hunger and thirst might do something, and yet not harm her beyond repair," suggested the worthy Catalan. "I have known thirst very grievous to bear; and hers would be more clinging since the Tiber flows at her dungeon bars."

"Deny her nought; it is the mind not carcass we must assail!" returned Cæsar, sternly. "And now, get me my Jewish gaberdine and beard, and a fisher-boat to take me to the Ghetto; and do thou remain keeping sure watch and ward in Santangelo; for at the worst I may ally me with the Orsini, and baffle aught her vengeance can project."

The noon of this eventful day witnessed the first results of the machinations of that direful genius which was now excited to exert its utmost powers. Donna Lucrezia was reclining on a couch in her apartments, ostensibly giving directions relating to the festival in the evening, but frequently forgetting what she said, or whom she addressed, when it was announced that two ancient women humbly desired admittance to her presence. Jewesses of the Ghetto the old women were declared to be, who came with a petition—probably on some of the numerous grievances suffered by their oppressed community. Their names were mentioned, and Lucrezia started and shuddered, and yet instantly commanded their admittance—a condescension to persons of so despised and loathed a class at which her ladies wondered, until their curiosity was excited by remembering the scene in which Miriam had played so prominent a part.

Notte and Morta entered the presence of the lady with deep oriental bends, but the lurking scorn on Notte's blue lips, and the viperous glitter in Morta's eye, caused vague alarm both in Lucrezia and her attendants. But the latter were soon released from their apprehensions, for the lady gave them all permission to retire in a manner which was a command. Yet it was not without almost visible signs of terror that she found herself left alone with the two weird and wicked old women.

The sorceresses on their part stared surprisedly, and exchanged their mute dialogue of looks, when Lucrezia turned on them the full beauty of her countenance, clouded as it was with an expression of trouble and fear. Notte gave a dark and envious scowl, pursing up her lean lips; but Morta smiled more terribly. Both the hags knelt, and reverentially kissed the hem of a rich cushion near the couch on which Lucrezia reclined.

Glancing with mingled loathing and terror at the fiendish pair, Lucrezia abruptly commanded them to declare their purpose; and both began to reply at once, but Morta soon gained the mastery, for Notte was troubled with an asthmatic wheeze, which quickly exhausted her stock of breath. Morta's explanation, which ran to a great length with her oriental amplitudes, and repetitions of Lucrezia's titles, amounted to a statement that the Senator of Rome, the Lord Orsino, had ordered their community to send them before his tribunal to answer certain charges that, old and withered as they were, they allured Christians to sin with them, by the power of philtres and magic spells, against the laws of Rome and of their own tribes, and under peril of the judgment of fire.

Lucrezia, amidst all her fear and horror, could not forbear a glance of incredulous disgust; but Notte continued in a manner which rapidly fascinated her curiosity and attention—

“True it is, our father taught us the skill of compounding beverages, whose power can overcome any indifference or coldness, or fix the passion of the most capricious and inconstant firm as the pillars of the temple of Solomon,” she said. “But, look on us, most beautiful lady; neither wanting many sunsets to round our years into a century of time—three generations of men have we seen from the cradle to the tomb.”

“Yet, sister, yea, let us confess the truth, for the proofs are known, and what is power if it cannot save?” exclaimed Morta. “Royal mistress! thou hast seen our child, our Miriam. Who can say that we slew or sought the life of her seducer, when to win her back to reason and happiness we have administered to him a wine which has lured him to his former love, and a too late remorse?”

“Hags! fiends! 'tis false!” exclaimed Lucrezia, her bright eyes flashing with fury. “Unless, indeed, ye pretend to have brought him from the grave whither ye—but yet I may believe something of your art. Yea, ye have direful secrets! But it cannot be. Ancient women, ye do but jest, or make vaunt of a science which ye do not, which ye cannot possess. And yet,” she added, her cheeks flushing deeply; “and yet—something I have heard. Was it not ye who wrought the spell for the daughter of the Colonnas?”

The sorceresses looked at each other with surprise, but emulously affirmed it.

“Were not my most illustrious lady too beautiful ever to need it—most blest of all the sons of Adam were he on whom she might deign to try the powers of the drink that I can brew,” said Morta, her whole skeleton quivering with eagerness.

“I have heard ye spoken of as women of a dark and terrible science; nay, I know it; but ye mock me to speak thus of such poor shows as chance has gifted me withal, which kindles some, it may be—ah, not to love, not to love!” she said, with a deep sigh. “And yet—were it possible!—it were indeed a rare disport to stir some cold and uncongenial nature with so divine a warmth; an ecstasy to laugh at, as of old they say men laughed at the pranks of their drunken slaves. It might divert a sadness which of late possesses me—ye may have heard I am not wont to it—to behold some such merry ribaldry! I will care that the Orsino stays the meddling of his officers with ye;—but if ye can procure me an elixir of this transcendant power, I will reward your toil as richly as a dying king the physician who restores him to life and health.”

“You tax our skill too lightly, glorious princess! This essence is the

least of the secrets we possess," returned Notte, chafing her bony hands with joy.

"We have secrets to make a fiend beautiful!" said Morta, willing to support her sister in her vaunts.

"Why, then!" exclaimed Lucrezia, and although she checked herself suddenly, Morta comprehended that she had escaped an involuntary but not flattering candour.

"But we cannot restore the marrows of age; our father died even on the brink of discovering the essences which flowed in the sap of the tree of life," she exclaimed.

Lucrezia mused for several instants profoundly, while the sister apothecaries watched her with intense eagerness; and when suddenly she raised her eyes, and encountered the grey, malignant twinkle in Morta's wrinkled orbs, she gave a start, and some undefined suspicion seemed to enter her mind. "Spare," she said, "thine eloquence; what I see of your skill I will believe; but be well assured that the ingredients of your charm are harmless, for to mine own lips will I commend it first; and should any ill befall me, worse will happen, as ye may guess, to yourselves and all your tribes, not only in Rome, but throughout the whole Christian world."

Morta herself for one involuntary instant stood amazed and doubtful. "But, lady!" she exclaimed, "you will then share the passion, and it will last perchance as long as yourself."

"And so I would have it," replied Lucrezia. Again the hags looked in astonishment at each other, at a statement so contrary to the received opinions on her volatile character; but bending to the marble pavement, Morta replied with oriental apathy, "The children of thy people were born to command—the children of mine to obey."

CHAPTER XLIV.

"Yield up, O Love, thy crown and bearded throne
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspices' tongues!" SHAKSPERE.

The Quest of Ladies was held with all suitable pomp and chivalric ceremonial. The court was assembled in a great saloon of the palace, and it seemed as if Lucrezia had exhausted all the arts of her voluptuous and splendid imagination in preparing the spectacle. The very heavens were in collusion with her—deluging the earth with the glory and melancholy of the setting sun. The music which breathed around, whence none discerned, diffused a delicious sadness like the exhaustion of pleasure. The perfumes of flowers were so subtly mingled, that there was something of farewell tenderness and regret in the faint and dying odours they exhaled.

It might have owed something to the influence of these accessories, but even in the eyes of her most fervent worshippers Lucrezia's beauty had never seemed so perfect as on this fated eve; even the languor and slight paleness which shaded increased its subduing charm. Unlike the rest of

the ladies whom she had chosen to assist in the judgment, she was attired in a Sicilian garb, and wore only a simple wreath of myrtles and crimson aquatic flowers, similar to those which had once decked the hair of the Egerian nymph.

Alfonso was the first of the three tourneyers who mingled with the favoured courtiers admitted to the spectacle; and he watched the arrivals at a distance, with apparently but little interest. But when the Lord Paolo came, surrounded by a concourse of his friends, he bent eagerly forward, and noted the unusual warmth and familiarity of Le Beaufort's salutation, and the deep blush which dyed Lucrezia's face and bosom on receiving it. When he himself appeared before her, she turned pale, and her glance lightened with a singular tearfulness and imploring scrutiny upon him. The obdurate firmness with which he withheld his eyes from hers did then indeed visibly surprise her; but it also prevented him from observing the fierceness with which the Orsino gazed at him from behind the pontiff's chair.

Rallying with a strong and visible effort, Lucrezia declared immediately that the quest was opened. The three competitors were ordered to stand forward, in a space assigned them before their fair judges; and two heralds administered an oath to them, promising on their knighthood, and the honour due to the ladies, to relate truly what had befallen them on their enterprise to win the disputed crown.

As highest in rank, Paolo was called upon to begin, and a cushion of cloth of gold was set for him on which to kneel. Contrary to the general opinion of his eloquence and fluency, he gave a confused and hesitating account of his being the first to enter Capua with Cæsar's storming party, omitting all mention of the gallant part he had taken in the first assault. Le Beaufort reminded him of it, but he took no notice of the prompting beyond a hurried observation that therein he was only the foil of the glory of Le Beaufort himself.

"Ah, and ye call it glory!—so fair city a ruin now," said Lucrezia. "But so, if it be thus, let Sir Reginald follow with his legend."

The Hospitaller thought that the handsome English knight never looked more so than when, with a joyous and bounding step, he hastened forward, and knelt at Lucrezia's feet with an expression of real adoration. But—doubtless to deceive the gazers—Lucrezia's manner was cold and even displeased. The overflowing joy of the knight was instantly rebuked into limits; and as the particulars of the campaign were of course familiarly known, the very modest account which he gave of his achievements, and his endeavours rather to trumpet the Orsino's exploits than his own—declaring that although the first to enter Capua, he entered it a prisoner, the latter sword in hand, raised general murmurs of admiration.

"You have forgotten the share which you had in so generously rescuing from the plunderers, as a present to the holy Knight of St. John, the sultan's beauteous paramour," said Cæsar, who had glided imperceptibly into the assembly. Lucrezia started, and looked somewhat vacantly at the Hospitaller.

The only refutation which Alfonso deigned to make to this accusation was included in the "round unvarnished tale" which he delivered of his adventures in Capua: in which certes he seemed to acquit Cæsar of any tenderness for the sultan's paramour by the circumstantial account which he gave of his exertions and orders to effect her destruction. Alexander himself shuddered, and glanced with surprise at his son, who smiled,

and played with the jewelled hilt of his dagger. But never did the mild and meek Desdemona listen with more heartfelt interest and submissive admiration than now the proud-souled Lucrezia to the stately soldier's narrative. It was even forgotten, in the absorption with which he was listened to, that he continued standing—rather like a king expounding his will than a suppliant pleading his cause. Nor was it possible for the Hospitaller, with all his prepossession, to avoid being moved by the tears, the broken sighs, the long passionate looks of admiration, the heavings of her beauteous bosom, the deep flushes and rapid alternation of paleness, with every mood of the stirring tale. It suddenly and yet irresistibly struck even the exasperated Hospitaller that her ancient liking had returned, and that she had already transferred her licentious passions back to their first object.

But when the Hospitaller calmly related his rescue of Fiamma, and the respect with which he had treated her until she fled from his protection, Cæsar laughed aloud, and turning to the ladies, inquired jeeringly if they believed the tale?

“As truly as in mine own existence do I believe in it!” said Lucrezia, with vehement emotion, and though her eyes habitually shunned Cæsar's, they gleamed now upon him with an expression which made him start. “And, dearest ladies,” she continued, with a warm gush of tears, “in nowise to prejudice your wisdom, which hath but to judge of the valour of this noble chivalry, yet may we mark our sense of a deed which mingled virtues more godlike, by pledging the Knight of St. John in a precious wine, which none else shall share with us.”

Paolo started from the careless attitude in which he affected to stand; but a secret gesture from Cæsar restored him at least to outward tranquillity. Sir Reginald also turned very pale.

“Our sister has had too sharp experience of the Knight of St. John's inflexibility, not to believe in his friar-legend,” said Cæsar, laughingly, while Lucrezia beckoned to a black page who stood behind her chair with a golden salver, on which were a goblet and a flask richly chased—but she coloured and glanced at the Hospitaller with a look so full of overpowering recollections, or some strange motive exerted an influence upon him, that kneeling now for the first time, he exclaimed, “Nay, signor, 'tis not in humanity longer to maintain mine heresy against beauty so divine; to whose sovereign sway I yield and profess myself ever the bond slave!”

“The play is played out, then,” said Cæsar, with a mystic glance at the Orsino, who smiled luridly.

With a radiance of pleasure which literally lighted up her beauty as if with an unseen sunbeam, Lucrezia gazed at her vanquished antagonist; and though there was much in his countenance to puzzle her scrutiny, her satisfaction vented itself in a renewed passion of tears. Alexander laughed triumphantly as with a hand which trembled aspenly she herself poured a fine crimson wine into the goblet until it swelled over the golden brim. There was a simultaneous bustle of pages and attendants presenting fruit and wine to the guests, and the Orsino mechanically took a peach from a salver which was held to him, but never for a moment averted his gaze from Lucrezia, until she lifted the goblet to her lips, and faltering forth “To thee!” with a glance at the Hospitaller which went to his heart's core, she drank strangely deep in the goblet, and bending over him held it herself to his lips. The sweet evening breeze stirring among her golden hair almost mingled its tresses with the close dark curls of the

Hospitaller; and in the trance in which their eyes met neither noticed the pangs which distorted the features of the Orsino, the astonishment of Sir Reginald, or the fiendish smile of Cæsar.

Alexander beckoned to the Orsino and Sir Reginald to approach his own seat, and began laughing and jesting with them somewhat tartly on the strange preferences of women to mild and merciful deeds, even when lured by the glitter and pomp of those of warlike triumph. Paolo felt that he was purposely drawn away, and yet he affected to answer with perfect gaiety and good humour, while his eye never in reality wandered from Lucrezia. Every instant his sufferings increased, and apparently his resolution to suppress all exterior sign.

If the wine which the Hospitaller drank with Lucrezia were not in reality compounded of magic ingredients, the most potent philtre could scarcely have been more efficacious. For the first time it seemed as if he had yielded up his whole soul and senses to the fascinations of the marvellous beauty; and with such loveliness exhausting upon him all its treasury of infinite charms, wit, and tenderness; stirred by every motive of triumph and rivalry; his heart in reality consumed by passion—even if a deceptive apology had not worked in his own mind, it would scarcely have been possible to resist the spell.

Alexander himself perhaps at length noticed something singular in the length and closeness of the conference; and desired Master Burciardo to inform Lucrezia that he was about to retire. The Orsino observed that after this intimation was delivered the Hospitaller again knelt in farewell thanks for the honour vouchsafed to him; that he uttered some words in a tone so low that it might be called a whisper, and that Lucrezia's whole physiognomy rosied over, her eyes cowered beneath the Hospitaller's eager gaze, and rising she averted her head, colouring still more profoundly, and murmuring some shame-struck and yet passionate and consenting tones, rather than words, extended her hand, which he pressed not only to his lips but to his breast repeatedly.

The departure of Lucrezia with the pontiff and the usual attendants on their persons was the signal for dissolving the court; and Cæsar himself accompanied the Orsini to their retinue. It was observed by the gendarmes of the court that, not content with this mark of honour, he invited Le Beaufort, their known *intermedio*, to accompany him to his palace.

Alfonso, meanwhile, retired to his apartment; and Bembo, who rapidly followed, and who, contrary to his custom, had kept himself as much as possible of late in the shade, found him pacing it in great agitation.

The canon somewhat falteringly congratulated him on his influx of favour with Donna Lucrezia; but the prince interrupted him with so vehement a diatribe against her, in which he spared not to apply the most opprobrious designations appropriated to the sex, like those of rascal and villain by the stronger one, that Bembo stared in surprise and alarm. But his own virtuous indignation was kindled almost equally when Alfonso communicated his discovery of the intrigue with Sir Reginald, and belief that on the *encouragement* (that was his word) which he had purposely extended to her, her unbounded profligacy had already changed object, and reverted to her original designs on himself. But the canon had yet to hear, with unbounded astonishment, the adventure of the catacombs, and the discovery rendered in vain by the prior one; and he was seldom more eloquent than in the epithets with which he branded this extraordinary and unbounded license; and he responded with the utmost alacrity

to his lord's commands to have all things ready for his abrupt and secret departure on the following day.

The agitation of the prince was not diminished by its vehement outbursts; and when the evening darkened in, and he was left alone in obedience to his command, any one who had watched him might have imagined they beheld a man condemned to some dreadful doom, and awaiting it in the utmost perturbation. But he was not destined to the solitude he desired. An attendant announced a messenger from Lombardy, who desired to communicate certain news of which he was the bearer; and ere he could refuse or assent, the man himself stepped into the chamber. Scarcely glancing up in his agitation, Alfonso dismissed the page, and desired the Lombard to deliver his tidings; when suddenly stepping towards him, and removing his broad cap and a false beard of great length, the messenger presented the apparition of Paolo Orsino!

“Signor Orsino!—and here?” exclaimed the knight; scarcely for the instant believing in the evidence of his own eyes.

“Yea, and on an errand which touches your life, Knight of St. John!” returned Paolo, controlling his voice with difficulty into some calmness. “Partly to you I owe mine own, and partly now I retaliate the gift, since existence is misery. Leave this murderous palace and city with what speed you may, since even such an enemy as the Duke of Romagna has sworn your destruction, and but delays the stroke because he confides the vengeance to me, whom thou hast chiefly wronged.”

“To-morrow, at this hour, I trust to be out of the shadow of the walls of Rome; but until then I cannot, and I will not, depart unless I see better reason than a vague threat or warning like this, my lord,” replied Alfonso.

“To return within what space,—to bear your sovereign his fair spouse, with whom to-night you quaffed a precious elixir of love to weld your compact more infrangibly?” returned Paolo, bitterly smiling with the calm of excess of passion.

“What fair spouse is this?—Elixir of love!—signor, you rave!” said the Hopitaller.

“A treachery which should bring down the lightnings—wherefore should it not absolve my hand to avenge it?” muttered Paolo darkly. “But no! my life is thy debtor!—but I warn thee; thy treachery is known to me, thy rival and hater—and shall soon be to thy masters and the sudden pontiff himself.”

“I freely acquit you of all restraint, Orsino, conditioning that you explain these strange words,” said Alfonso, sternly, and yet his features flushed.

“Ha! and demand it with so bold a front that would abash the accusing angel himself!” exclaimed Paolo, wildly. “Answer me, unblenching innocence! art thou not here in Rome the secret envoy of the Dukes of Ferrara, to win their son his bride, and yet this very night, perchance!—Patience, patience, let us not go mad!—But hear me! I tell thee, the philtre which Lucrezia shared with thee to cement your guilty love, has betrayed it! ay, and to Cæsar, who demanded but the certainty to crush thee into dust. The hags who sold your lady-love her charm are but his instruments—Notte and Morta!”

“An elixir in the draught I drained!—Methought, indeed, that a subtle fire—but Cæsar!—was it poison, then? Yet it cannot be, since she drank deeply of it—so deeply that I marvelled!—an elixir of love?”

“So deemed she—that, shared, it would make your mutual passion eternal!” returned Paolo. “But there was no other elixir nor poison in it than the lips of so beauteous a serpent must leave. Be well assured there was no traitor-bane in it,—for it was known by those who mixed it that she meant to share the draught.”

“And sharing it so amply—she meant, certes, to partake my doom if aught of evil were in it!” Exclaimed Alfonso. “But, no, no! she suspected your artifice, and intended effectually to deceive ye; or if, indeed, she sought with a hellish charm, matchlessly depraved and perfidious harlot! this indeed shall steel my heart to the fitting chastisement of thy vileness! By heaven, if she had remained faithful, even to her falsehood, it had not stirred my soul to so utter a loathing and contempt. But to your heavy charge, noble Orsino, I answer what your Reginald, too, must avouch—that I am even the absolute contrary of an envoy to win the Prince of Ferrara a bride in Lucrezia Borgia.”

“Le Beaufort hath indeed oft averred it to me—nay, that you sought proofs against her to justify your prince’s refusal to wed with her,” replied the Orsino. “But he was deceived too! Cæsar himself revealed to me your secret errand, which he discovered by chance; and deny if thou canst that in this evening’s conference, Lucrezia commanded you, in her sire’s name, showing thereby her own assent, to make your embassy public in to-morrow’s audience.”

“I deny it not, and confess, moreover, that but for what followed I had been amazed at the confidence in my submission with which she made it—for both herself and Cæsar know the true purpose of my embassy—which is what I have alleged,” replied the Hospitaller. “Lend me a patient ear, and I will expound this mystery to you; and let the whole course of my demeanour confirm what I declare.”

It had now become a matter of infinite consequence to the Prince of Ferrara to sever the dangerous union of the Borgias and Orsini, but it was not without a lingering hesitation that he related his adventure of the valley of Egeria, which tallied so closely with the Orsino’s recollections that he could scarcely entertain a doubt of the truth of the statement.

“Why, then, he hath fooled me all and ever! It was upon that very night that Cæsar declared to me his discovery of your embassy,” he exclaimed, wildly. “But, no, it was not in humanity to resist the allurements which thou feignest were offered to thee.”

“I tell thee Cæsar was present;—but thou knowest not all his monstrous turpitude!” said the Hospitaller, with a natural shudder. “Remember all that followed, and thou canst not doubt my truth;—the Jewesses—the tournament! Wherefore she betrayed me not I cannot dream, unless to keep your fears turned from another. Yet will I not belie her to confirm my tale, for all that I have learned acquits her of the dark accusations of which I came to gather proof. But one hath been too fatally proved; and rather with my will shall the earth be heaped on the last of the great line of Este, than its bright honour be lost in a harlot’s transmission.”

“Look that thou prove she merits this foul blazonry, or—but if thou canst prove it!—Knight of Ferrara, the Ursine blood was noble and Romau ere the barbarian Guelf crossed the Alps!” said Paolo, ravingly. “Prove it, I say! Speak out, then; of what dost thou accuse Lucrezia Borgia?”

“Ask it of Sir Reginald!—Bid him tell you whither he followed her

female Pandarus, Faustina, last night—and where and how he spent it?" replied Alfonso, whitening at his own words.

"He spent it abroad, indeed, and gave but staggering answers to my jests!" exclaimed the Orsino, gasping for breath. "But thou wilt not say—thou canst not!—speak, or let my bursting heart out with thy dagger!"

"Recall all their conduct—Lucrezia's preference and open coquetry—and ask me no more, when I tell you that—detecting him at secret rendezvous in the palace—he confessed that he was summoned to a private audience with Lucrezia on your affairs."

"'Tis false!—'tis utterly false?—all was at an end—none knew it better than he!" exclaimed Paolo. "On that very day the traitor declared to me his resolve of parting from Rome to return to his native land—hath of late oft cradled me with such assurances—and I thought I but prevailed upon him to stay by declaring all my projects, and the incalculable service he might be to me in foiling Caesar's."

"Why, then, beware lest he hath not betrayed all your plans to his leman, for I swear by the blessed cross I have in nowise belied him!" replied Alfonso, his indignation boiling over at this perfidy. "Nay, more, if thou wilt listen;" and he related his surprisal of Le Beaufort in the avowal of his passion, in the labyrinth of the Minotaur.

"How came I so little to suspect him, and always thee?" exclaimed the Orsino, bewilderedly, yielding to this torrent of testimony. "Yet he himself did ever seem to have fears of thee. Oh, that I had never known the curse of consciousness! Le Beaufort! the friend whom I cherished in my heart's core!—Only Lucrezia could have made a villain so black of one whom nature meant for honesty. But all that thou sayest may be but cozenage. What proof have I but 'tis thou betrayest me?"

"Wherefore should I cozen thee with words?—I have but to raise my voice, and thou art a prisoner, in the power of thy worst foes, for where are thy friends and swordsmen now?" replied Alfonso. "But if I proclaim and brand her openly, wilt thou still resolve to wed the ancient glories of thy name with her dishonour, if himself cannot refute nor deny my accusation?"

"Do men indeed believe my madness is so base?" exclaimed the Orsino. "I did but project to await your offer, and the pontiff's acceptance, to-morrow, to proclaim their perfidy, quit Rome, and by a great stroke restore the heart to our confederacy, which, unless I am betrayed—ay, and Reginald lingered with the Borgia!"

"If it be so thou shalt share with me a draught of vengeance whose fulness shall nigh cloy us both," said Alfonso, his eyes sparkling with the fury of his thoughts. "Truly I do believe that in the dangerous state of the Borgian fortunes—and for that she may have heard her young barbarian is a bosom-guest in Ferrara—or merely to strike fear into your confederacy—she thinks by mingling terror with cajolery to make me false to my masters' trust, and use the powers they confided in me, if I could establish her innocence, to offer their alliance. Wherefore she desired to speak with me in private on the matter; and when I dared to request, murmuring something of espial, that it might be by night and alone, she answered with assent, and a promise to send Faustina to guide me to her audience, at an hour when we need fear no observation!"

"Ay, it was then, with that blush, and that glance of fire!" muttered the Orsino, slowly recovering from the shock of this announcement as if

from a thunder stroke. “ And thou wilt go.—But what matters it to me?”

“ Yea, I will go—To satisfy mine own sense of her vileness, for all things else may deceive,” returned Alfonso. “ But gaze not thus wildly at me! I swear to thee, by all my hopes of salvation, I go but to fill up the measure of the scorn and detestation which I have ever meted to her—to repulse her, the woman, the beauty, the Borgia! even when she has de-based herself to this lowest and last degradation to win me, when she imagines herself on the brink of triumph, for therefore did I seem to yield to her spells to-day—leaving the perpetual memory of my scorn twined like a serpent in her heart-strings!”

A wild discordant laugh from the Orsino interrupted him, which he broke short abruptly in the middle of the peal. “ But dost thou truly think that, alone of all mankind, thou hast this superhuman constancy?” he exclaimed. “ Or inflicting so grievous an insult on a woman and a Borgia, dost thou in reality hope to leave Rome alive?”

“ With such a secret in my power, what dares she do?—And I have been essayed,” returned Alfonso, flushing deeply. “ And moreover, she has deceived her sire, and dares not accuse me. At worst she will spare me until the audience to-morrow;—and now I speak of vengeance! If thou wilt promise me the shelter and protection of thy power to leave this palace and Rome, I will therein publicly declare my real embassy—declare that it is accomplished by discovery of her preference of the Knight of England;—and thereby shall I indissolubly knit into your alliance the powerful princes of Ferrara.”

“ Give me this vengeance, and take all things else that are mine—life itself!” exclaimed the Orsino, frantic with the violence of his passions. “ And that thy lords may not accuse thee of precipitation, learn what were the projects of the Borgias on their states.”

And without pausing in his vehemence, the Orsino revealed the conspiracy against Ferrara, into which Cæsar had cajoled him by his perjuries, to one who, though he knew it not, was the most interested of all men in the discovery. The tidings confirmed Alfonso in the expediency of producing an open rupture among his enemies, since all hope of the alliance was at an end; and he renewed his engagement and strengthened his revelations with so many additional proofs, that all doubt was removed from Paolo’s mind. He knew, moreover, that the envoy could not otherwise hope to escape Cæsar’s vengeance after the discovery by the philtre; and they parted under a mutual oath to perform their parts in the compact to the utmost.

CHAPTER XLV.

“ Yet therewithal this warning word he joined;
‘ Strains such as these befit not baser ear :
To carles, to faitors, to unfolden clear,
Love’s mystic lore doth much that love profane;
To clerks, to knights, to melting damsels dear,
Yet more to all who weep for others’ pain,
Love’s lessons and delights do chiefly appertain.’”

Fabliau of the XIIth Century.—LEGRAND, by WAY.

It was verging towards midnight when the Knight of St. John found himself seated alone in an apartment of Lucrezia’s suite, whither he was guided by Mona Faustina, mumbling confusedly against the policies which kept

her nursling from her pillow; and who then retired to announce his arrival.

It needed all the indignation which his recollections could rekindle to support the Hospitaller in the resolves he had formed, and to prevent the inflow of very contrary thoughts and feelings when he was left to his anticipations of the approaching interview. He was in a chamber of that ineffable species which would now be styled a boudoir, but was called in the palace Capriccio Madama. The Borgian love and luxury had exhausted themselves in the decorations of this sanctuary of their gorgeous ornament, and it seemed rather a work of fairy than of human art. The walls were painted in the richest arabesque, mingling the most splendid colours with forms of marvellous beauty and grace, linked in inextricable twinnings, and apparently uniting all the scattered colours and glories of the universe into one boundless profusion of magnificence. The couch of pale pink velvet on which Alfonso seated himself was perfumed with some sweet essence; and the whole air was aromatic with the scents fanning in from the flowery terraces of the Vatican below the windows. The only light, save that of a broad and effulgent moon, which the silken hangings but dimly shaded out, was showered from a marble group of great beauty; representing Psyche discovering Cupid. All around were the implements of female occupation, or evidence of the refined amusements in which Lucrezia delighted—the gilded distaff, rich embroidery, instruments of music, and manuscripts prepared for so illustrious a perusal, with various and most beautiful blazouries. The languid sweetness of the hour joined in conspiracy against the Hospitaller; the musical murmur of the distant fountains mingled with the notes of innumerable nightingales; the dreamy brightness of the moonlight: the soft mysterious whisperings of the leaves in the gentle air—touched subtle chords of love and pleasure in his breast. But even with these warring impulses at work, his regret and anguish and wrath seemed every instant to grow more wildly intense, until in his agony he felt prompted to a vengeance more terrible than that he had as yet meditated; as if he could without hesitation yield himself up to any doom, however tortuous, to relieve himself of the jealousy which ate with its poisoned fangs into his soul, and tear Lucrezia's beauty for ever out of the arms of his blest rival, even by hurling her into those of death. This black thought was vaguely whirling in his disordered fancy, when a door opened, and the lady of the Borgias, attended by Mona Faustina, made her appearance.

Alfonso had expected to behold her flushed with the triumph of her licentious arts, arrayed to dazzle and subdue; but he had not armed himself against the more seductive modesty of her white and totally unornamented garb, the paleness of her beautiful visage slowly tinted with a very faint rosiness when she felt how his gaze was fixed upon her, though the eyes which he expected to meet glowing with licentious fire were never once raised, and tears had evidently but lately hung upon their long lashes. But her voice trembled with some consciousness, when interrupting his confused and strangely humbled salutation, with a gesture which was at once dignified and agitated, she commanded Mona Faustina to retire, and give the envoy of Ferrara full latitude in declaring his master's will.

With a smile which evinced no great degree of goodwill to the knight, but in truth with something in it of malignancy and scorn, the nurse obeyed, leaving the doors open after her, as if purposely, and revealing a

vista of still more mysterious and recondite chambers—the next being that in which Alfonso had formerly noticed the alcove hung with gold-coloured satin, and the ceiling painted with Aurora meeting Night. His gaze then reverted in a tumult of passions which almost deprived him of his senses to Lucrezia—and he found that she seemed only intent on watching the figure of her duenna to a remote antechamber, in which her lamp and herself disappeared.

“My guard sleep beyond,” she then said, with something significant in her tone, but not without confusion. “Mona Faustina will wait to prevent any alarm which the unusual hour of this audience—but I pray you, signor, be seated.”

She motioned to the Hospitaller to take a chair at a considerable distance from a low couch of white velvet wrought with roses which she herself assumed, with the manner indeed of a queen about to hear some suppliant, rather than of a woman who had granted so dangerous a condescension to a lover. The Hospitaller, however, recovering from his first surprise, only thanked the lady with a deep bend, but still preserved his station at a much less distance than that indicated.

There were several moments of utter and most embarrassing silence, and but that his jealous thoughts suggested torturing causes, Alfonso could not but have been moved with the expression of dejection and subdued agitation which her whole look and attitude revealed. As it was, he dared not trust his voice to speak; and it was Lucrezia whose musical and tremulous tones at length broke the silence.

“Knight, you demanded that your audience should be secret ——” she said, pausing with visible embarrassment, and then suddenly resuming with firmness and haughtiness. “And if I have granted it—’tis because, knowing that your real motive and embassy from the princes of Ferrara is the very reverse of that which his paternity believes and desires to hear declared by you to-morrow—and remembering that I owe my life to you—I would repay the gift by requesting your acceptance of the means of immediate flight, which I have prepared and place at your command.”

Deeply touched as he was by this seemingly generous concern for his safety, the jealous suggestions which his fancy instantly mingled supported Alfonso in the vengeful part which he had planned to enact.

“Even the revolted angels were not expelled from paradise so suddenly, lady; and such your presence makes Rome, and this chamber, its divinest bower!” he replied in a low wooing tone, indescribably sweet to the sense that listened. “Neither were they condemned unheard;—and by whom am I accused to justify a punishment as severe as theirs?”

“Your once friend, the ballerina, has avowed all that passed between ye—are you not therein answered?” returned the lady, with rapidity.

“But it was my evil hap to offend in rejecting her tenderness, and may she not have belied or exaggerated my fault to your grace?” said the Hospitaller, fixing his burning gaze on the lady, for the recollections of the Egerian cave rushed overpoweringly back upon him.

“You own then, sir envoy, that it was a fault to believe so evilly of me?” she replied, with a most eager and inquiring glance, which she reverted instantly with confusion on meeting that of Alfonso.

“Again I demand my accusation, lady,” he said, cruelly enjoying the pangs which his question was likely to rekindle in her breast.

“Nay, nay, I will be plain with you,” she returned, with a touch of

strong indignation in her tones. “I do not—I cannot—it is impossible for me to doubt the ballerina’s report.”

“The ballerina!—wherefore, alas! is she so much the enemy of one who, despith all reason to the contrary, dotes even on the shadowy sweetness of her remembrance, and must for ever, if any power of the soul rests unchanged throughout its immortality!” he returned with a warmth and sincerity of passion not to be doubted; and it almost seemed as if Lucrezia were jealous of her own rivalry, for she replied with precipitation—“Nay, she is not thine enemy—nay, she hath not belied thee; and, knight, thou wilt not dare to plead so, when I tell thee the ballerina was Lucrezia Borgia!”

“Most exquisite loveliness! and I knew it!” exclaimed Alfonso, almost vanquished when he marked the deep blush of recollection which instantly dyed her visage, while all she had avowed in her precipitation recurred to her. Her only resource was anger, and that she took.

“Why, then, how daredst thou to question me—me—myself?—how darest thou even here? If I were the tigress thou wouldst have had me proved, how darest thou stand before Lucrezia Borgia and avouch thy calumnies?” she said with vehemence.

“On my lips, lady, still lurks the ravening fire the ballerina left there!—how could I fear that I was mortal, surviving the rapture of that instant?” he said, in tones which vibrated through the enamoured soul of the beauteous Borgia, though shame and anger only sparkled in her expression, as she replied, “Ah, even now you flatter like fear! But you misdoubted your mortality when you told the nun of the Agonizants that Lucrezia Borgia had attempted your life with poison! Oh, our Lady, your life!”

“And shall I say the gentle nun belied me, too?—or more truly confess—and to herself—that I belied the gentle nun?” said Alfonso, drawing somewhat nearer; but an impatient gesture from the lady admonished him to remain where he was.

“And yet—with all these proofs—but it matters not. Return to thy harsh north, and save thyself from my father’s anger—for that is deadly,” she replied, shuddering, and yet with evident hesitation.

“Why should I dread your father’s wrath, lady, when, with these proofs indeed, and many others which my toilsome ventures have attained, I have established your innocence of all the charges which the ballerina wept to hear?” he replied. “Then, wherefore should I fly—wherefore should I not fulfil my sovereign’s commission, and demand you as his bride before the world?”

“And I will answer you!” returned Lucrezia with vivacity. “The pride of the princes of Ferrara is, it seems, great, and I hear you will not expose them to the mortification of a refusal—which, by yonder most blessed image of our Lady of Tears! awaits your embassy from me, if after this warning you dare to utter it.”

She pointed somewhat forgeriously at a silver image of the Virgin over the alcove in the adjoining chamber; and the Hospitaller’s first surprise was followed by an influx of jealous suspicion.

“Certes, madama, you have sworn the rejection of this great alliance to some one who bath more sway over you than policy or ambition may claim;—ay, and perchance by the same holy and upgazing form!” he said, with wrathful vehemence. “For my lord’s questionings and doubts thus fairly ending and resolved cannot alone have moved you to this anger.”

“Nay, rather, I honour him for his princely refusal to mate with dishonour!” she replied with enthusiasm. “But you have shown yourself too jealous of his happiness and renown for me to doubt your answer when I ask you if you deem he could content him with the casket of a love—the jewel gone.”

“How says your grace!—that you love another?” exclaimed the Hospitaller, now fairly yielding to his agitation, and adding in a voice full of anguish and bitterness, “Fool that I was!—Oh, I dreamed that you loved, lady!—yet—not thus, not thus—when from my concealment in the grotto of Egeria I watched you awaiting the arrival of one—in whose stead came the Duke of Romagna.”

“Thon!—thou didst behold me, then?” ejaculated Lucrezia, hiding her face in her hands with excess of shame, and murmuring in the most dove-like tones of her sweet voice, “Yes! I loved once—then! But love barters his wares, not sells them: ‘tis all over now!”

“And if love barters—love me with the love of all thy sex, as I love thee with—nay, to infinitely beyond—all the love of mine!” said Alfonso, sinking in a delirium of passion at her feet. “Lucrezia! thou rapt perfection of all the divinity of woman!—‘tis thou hast belied me, that never from the instant I first beheld thy beauty have ceased to worship thee! to love thee dearer than my life, ay, even when I thought thou hadst attempted it and my honour together, when I deemed thee a marvel of wickedness that wert only one of goodness and loveliness.”

“Knight, dost thou forget? Yes, yes, I loved thee once; but now thou wrongest me more bitterly than my worst calumniator, to deem I loved the man, and not the hero! for betraying thus thy master and lord—how can I love thee longer?” she said, tearing her hand with vehemence from the kisses with which he covered it, and for a moment her countenance wore an expression of disdain and indignation, which suddenly melted away in a shower of tears. “I cannot do it!” she exclaimed, in vain attempting to staunch the flow. “Knight, I will confess to thee all! It was my purpose to cajole thee into this wild outburst, that I might taste the luxury which we Borgias are said to find in revenge, and repel your passion with scorn; heap on you the remorse of having violated your faith, and the white purity of honour you had preserved untainted, to my scorn! But no, it is not so; an accursed philtre, administered in the draught wherewith I pledged you, works in your veins? Leave me!—fly!—thou seest I am as evil as thou canst deem me.”

Veheimently as this most generous avowal smote the conscience and heart of the Hospitaller, the very beauty of the confusion and tenderness with which she made it raised his regrets, and revenge, and jealousy, and love, in a whirlwind which threatened to sweep away every restraint.

“There is no philtre—albeit my veins flow only fire—but thy divinest and most subtle spells of beauty at work in my soul!” he said with frenzied fervour. “Cæsar himself sent to thee the hags, Notte and Morta, that he might set murderous jealousies upon me, and discover truly whom thou didst love. But it seems it was a fallacy; and thou didst pledge me but to make thyself a mirth and mockery of my madness!”

“Not so, not so!—leave me, and I will swear to thee by any oath which to break is perdition—that I have loved but once, and thee!” wept Lucrezia, sinking her fair face in her agony of shame and fear like a rose too heavily laden with dew.

“Nay, then, if thou lovest me! If thou lovest me!—and parting

thus for ever!—I will return that kiss whose poison lurks like madness in my blood!" said the Hospitaller wildly—and Lucrezia started up from him in terror, with difficulty eluding his frantic embrace.

"I love thee!—in very truth I love thee!—but do not frighten me!" she exclaimed, finding herself as instantly entangled in his arms. "Forgive me but this once. Indeed I have not wronged thee, for I have confessed my wicked sorceries!—Swear then to leave me on the instant, and give me back my madness if thou wilt—that therein all may be as it had never been!"

"Sorceress! fiend!—for then I were lost!—no, no, begone, begone! Be not false at least to thy falsehood! Those lips still burn with pressings to which mine would seem too cold!" exclaimed the Knight of St. John, almost flinging her from the embrace to which she was yielding in mingled fear and tenderness. "Leave thee!—yea, and for ever, to find a fitter successor for Reginald le Beaufort, when thou hast had more time to be awarey of him!"

"Successor!—Sir Reginald le Beaufort!" repeated Lucrezia, almost unconscious for the instant with unutterable shame and amazement.

"No, no! thou shalt not wreath me to perdition, thou fairest serpent!" he continued, desperately. "Thy plot was mine, too; to lure thee to this yielding that I might tell thee how I loathe and spurn thy harlot love, and defy its most bewildering temptations!"

"Temptations!—I!—successor!" repeated Lucrezia, vacantly; and then as if consciousness had slowly returned upon her, she said in a voice of supernatural calmness, and yet with a wild derisive laugh of anguish, "Thou hast not noted then, good knight, that—albeit out of hearing—Mona Faustina is in sight?" and without turning, she indicated with a gesture the ancient nurse, who was indeed visible at the end of the vista of apartments, affecting to nod in an easy chair, but looking towards them.

"This is but thy masterpiece of craft, perfidious woman!" said Alfonso, but indeed infinitely staggered. "Thou dreamest with thy false denials and chaste seemings to lure me into mating the bright and unstained honours of Este with thine infamy!"

"And dost thou feign still to disbelieve in my innocence, most unjust and cruel of men?" exclaimed Lucrezia, with an indignation and fury which seemed at length to have overpowered all the gentler passions in her Borgian blood.

"Innocence!—Why then my own sense cheated me, when I heard the false Knight of England declare his love, unblamed and unreproved in the labyrinth of the Minotaur!" he replied. "Deemest thou that I was blind not to note your warmth before—your dotage after? Ha, and Bembo—Bembo that was ever your unwearied advocate—Bembo reported how ye met! But that is little—Oh, that is little!—ask thine own heart, vilest as thou art loveliest of thy treacherous sex! what I would say,—for words would choke me!"

"Sir Reginald!—Oh, thou but speakest of him!" returned Lucrezia, with a singular and wild joy breaking through the thunder-cloud of passions which shadowed her visage. "Nay, then, I will leave thee no corner of evasion. When thou recallest all thy harshness to one who loved thee, and for that cause, thou shalt not cheat thy remorse with any other pretext, and say 'twas for this or this. It is wrung from my soul, a woman's soul, mark me, knight!—ay, even were I the woman thou

wouldst prove me, to justify thy most unchristian abhorrence, which hath no drop of pity in all its depths!—I loved thee; I have avowed it, from the instant thy first glance of lofty pride and scorn fell upon me; and the terror which thy harsh and implacable character struck ever in my soul but farther subjected its slavish female nature, which I could weep to remember, but that it would rejoice thee to see my weakness!—I will not shed a single tear, but I will tell thee, knight!—Oh, if it was a woman's artifice to deem by jealousy to kindle into fire the spark of love thou didst confess had fallen into that cold heart of thine, blame nature that made me one!—Thou heardest the poor youth's avowal of his love, whereto I had led him beyond mine intent, which was but to flaunt thee with his presence—but tarried not my sharp repulse, nor his remorseful atonement, for nobly did his generous and high nature struggle ever till then against my cruel artifices;—cruel indeed, but bitterly hath the cup I held been returned to my own lips!"

"A well-devised legend; your grace is an improvisatrice of known skill," said Alfonso. "But wherefore, when there was no doting rival to be fooled, was it necessary to receive the northman with such ecstasies as one worth the credence reports?"

"Dost think I have not learned some pity from mine own suffering; that remorse, indeed, can find no entry in my soul; that no feeling burned there when I heard the tale of the paramour of Sultan Zem?" said Lucrezia, shrinking timidly from the increasing violence of the Hospitaller's look and manner. "And why should I veil the horror familiar to thy knowledge as to mine? Cæsar was present. What if it was the artifice of the silly dove to flutter round the bush where her nest is not? And, moreover, the canon himself—alack, but I must smile—I had found but too much occasion to reprove the demonstrations of his own liking, not to deem that he has exaggerated in his report of my favour to another!"

"Indeed, indeed!—but being all compounded of sorceries, how shall I blame him?" raved the knight. "This is good talk! But what convincing falsehood hast thou to excuse Sir Reginald's presence here,—his secret interview with thee last night, in these very chambers, with only these wanton stars, and the upturned eyes of thy Madonna, and the heavy lids of Mona Faustina, for witnesses?"

"Here—in these chambers—last night! which of us is mad?" said Lucrezia, turning very pale.

"Ay, wouldest thou have circumstance? Then listen, and I will overwhelm even the customary assurance of thy trade," said Alfonso, clutching her hand and holding it violently, as she turned as if meditating flight in her alarm; and with inconceivable rapidity, and yet with perfect clearness, he related his adventure of the previous night with Sir Reginald.

"And can it be—my old nurse, too, betray me!" exclaimed Lucrezia, with a sudden torrent of tears. "But it cannot be!—the noble English knight would not thus belie me, or if to vex thee—if fearing thine errand.—But no, but no! it is thou, who, finding no other calumny left to blacken me withal, hast invented this to please thy barbarous lords."

"Nay, if thou hast no prettier-coloured legend than this—this cannot dazzle us out of our sight," returned Alfonso, with bitter scorn, releasing her hand, and folding his arms, as if he had reached a conclusion in which to rest.

"Ah, then indeed my cruel sport is fairly retaliated—or he too is the victim of some black deceit," exclaimed the lady, gazing at the incontrovertible signs of agony visible in Alfonso's features. But laughing sardonically and with utter scorn, he bowed deeply as if dismissed, and made a retrograde step.

"Why then—either thou feignest, or thou shalt believe in me!" she exclaimed, darting forward and in turn detaining him by the hilt of his sword. "How might this be, harsh man! sithence I spent the hours of which you accuse me—not in these chambers—not in this palace—not with Sir Reginald—but with thee, in the catacombs of San Sebastian, playing a dire part in that dire scene, where thou too—if thine hardness were to be convinced even by supernatural assurance—heardst the full confirmation of mine innocence!"

Alfonso could only gaze at the speaker in utter and overwhelming amazement.

"I will not leave thee any pretext of doubt," she continued, with torrent-like vehemence. "It was when I was weeping in my loneliness over thine imagined preference of the sultan's paramour, and the threats and inextricable terrors that environed me—when one implored an audience of me—they told me a woful suppliant from Capua; and, for thou knowest that I am stern and merciless in all my dealings, but that I rejoice ever to witness calamity, I had not granted audience to the daughter of the Colonnas—for she it was! Ah, then indeed, listening to her wrongs and sufferings, did I comprehend what humanity can endure, and yet its outward framework yield not. She related all her wrongs, thy generosity, that direful confidence which she exchanged, Cæsar's long calumnies against me, his hideous crimes—but those had long haunted me with shadows like certainties,—the part she had played in the carnival, at his command, to support with visible facts the taints upon my name! Alack, she is a wild and fearful thing, acquainted with strange secrets, perchance supernatural, and gifted with the mastery of mind. Something she spoke of proving mine innocence—of a just vengeance on Cæsar—of removing thy suspicions, and thereby to attain for me thy master's ducal crown. But, believe me, there was but one motive which gave me the courage to obey her—to do and dare what I have done and dared—and that—that could not be a woman's longing for the gauds of sovereignty, since—and all misery catch me if it be not so, even thy deeper hate!—since, unless the impossible can be, unless *thou* wert Alfonso of Ferrara—force nor prayers should ever make me share his crown, were it imperial!"

"Why this is as marvellous as the rest! But tell out thy tale, lest the dream should vanish ere I can list its comfort to some credibility," said Alfonso, breathlessly.

"I know not with what bribes Fiamma had gained a wizard to her purposes in whom Cæsar trusts," she continued rapidly. "But thou wert to be present, and the frenzy of my despair and indignation, and hope to check the violent career of the fiend men call my brother, and Fiamma's words of fire, gave me courage for all things. Sorcery was perchance in it—nay, 'tis certain—albeit she wrought with strange mirrors, and the gracious portrait of my lost Francesco which was in this chamber ever until then. Yet it was Cæsar's jealous fears which chose the depths of the catacombs for the unhallowed mystery, familiar to her and to Dom Sabbat, and all those whose science needs darkness and terrific silence

and shelter from the espial of humanity. No, no, all holy saints be praised ! his gentle spirit was not troubled in its repose, since when the unearthly shadow was raised, despite the fears which nigh overwhelmed me, she was compelled to place me there to imitate his voice, and speak the words which Cæsar scorned, even believing that the grave opened its earthy mouth and spoke. O, heaven and Francesco, pardon, if the work was as unholy and unblest as in the delirium of my thoughts I dreamed it holy and helpful then !”

“ Let me not wake from this dream, unless to die !” exclaimed the Hospitaller, incredulous with the very excess of the triumph and joy which rushed in full tide over his soul. “ Lucrezia ! my own ! my all ! and when thou badst him wed thee where thyself shouldst deign to choose, tell me —didst thou then think of me ?”

“ Knight of St. John ! that were, I knew, impossible !—I sought but to deliver myself for ever from all wearying of the kind, living out my days for thy sake in unloved solitude,” she replied.

There was a moment’s struggle in Alfonso’s breast, but his unquiet and too craving spirit, and the bewildering influence, perchance, of a now unresisted passion, brought strange words to his lips.

“ Thou lovest me !—I worship thee !—It is in my power, thou knowest, thou ecstasy of beauty ! Be mine, and by all that men hold dear or sacred thou shalt also be the wife of Alfonso of Este !”

“ Out and alas ! and hast thou cast the divine mask, and art a devil too ?” exclaimed Lucrezia, repulsing him with the fiercest scorn. “ Traitor ! I spurn thee ! and these words have broken a spell which honour and pride and every outraged feeling of my heart could not ! Leave me for ever, and on the instant, or thy wronged lord shall know what manner of ambassador the end proves thee !”

“ Say what thou wilt against me to Alfonso, still he will love me dearly as himself, and thee many a myriad more !” returned the Hospitaller, all his scruples and jealousies utterly dissipated ; “ miracle of thy sex ! for I am he !”

Lucrezia gazed at him as if she feared he was struck with sudden madness ; but in an instant the certainty flashed over her, in the rapid arrangement of all the strange inconsistencies of his conduct which rushed upon her recollection. Yet, instead of any utterance of joy, she grew instantly quite colourless, and but that Alfonso clasped and supported her as she sunk on the couch, she must have fallen to the ground.

“ Ah ! now indeed, Fra Bruno, Heaven’s vengeance lights on my share in the guilty blood of our house !” she said, in a low, fear-struck tone. “ I had taught my soul patience in the impossibility which I imagined ever to be honourably thine, and now !—O ! thou knowest not there is a curse denounced on all whom my love approaches, and on mine own head, which Fra Bruno was miraculously loosened from his dungeon to declare to me.”

“ Fra Bruno !—loveliest, calm thy fears !—Fra Bruno is but an imposter, or at best a madman,” he replied, with inexpressible satisfaction at finding the obstacle no mightier. “ But didst thou not with thine own sweet eyes behold that the necromancer Sabbat and he are one, which Cæsar revealed when his jealousy choked life awhile in his veins, chance bringing me to their sight when they invoked some fiend to show to their hatred whom Lucrezia loved ?”

But the Hospitaller now learned that Lucrezia had become senseless

with the shriek which he had imagined the despairing phantom uttered, and was borne forth by Fiamma ere she had recovered full consciousness. The rest of the scene was therefore a new marvel to her; but now satisfied with his revelation of the identity of the monk and sorcerer, Alfonso declared his suspicions of Fra Bruno's passion, revealing all his reasons against the unfortunate friar, rousing her indignation to the highest by relating his testimony as confessor against her; his attempt to prevent him from appearing in the tourney by administering some poisonous drug, and laying the blame upon her; and above all, by reminding her tenderly of the scene of the hermitage on Aventine—which restored the rich tints to Lucrezia's complexion, but left her no room for defence or doubt.

The mutual and now unreserved confidence of the lovers which followed—the bewildering rapture of their acknowledgments of love and interchange of oaths and promises unbounded—the comparison of their adventures and sufferings—the intermingled tears and smiles with which Lucrezia listened to the story of the knight's long struggles, and the dangerous subtleties he had practised to win light on his perplexities, we leave to the reader's imagining and recollection; but the full revelation entailed new terrors and perplexities on Lucrezia. Vehemently as her indignation was roused by the plan of the Orsino to overwhelm her with public disgrace, her fears were all concentrated on Cæsar. It was not probable, indeed, that Faustina would betray their interview to Cæsar, inasmuch as she had consented to it against all his designs and policy, and with the belief that her lady purposed to use it in cajoling the emissary of Ferrara into using the powers confided to him to withdraw herself and nursing out of Cæsar's reach. It might be she was weary, or troubled in conscience at the treacherous part she had played, and desired to escape from the entanglement; but still it was possible that she might find it judicious to betray them, and she had for some time exhibited symptoms of impatience at the length of the interview, which Lucrezia had noticed, though unheeded by her lover. Moreover, Cæsar might have his suspicions roused by the discovery of the monk. Fiamma was, however, out of danger, for in parting she had declared to Lucrezia that, being satisfied of Cæsar's guilt, she intended to leave Rome for ever; and desired that no inquiry should be made for her until she sent word that she was in safety.

But Lucrezia would not listen to her lover's bold project of revealing Cæsar's crimes to the pontiff. She declared that the discovery would in all probability completely overwhelm him in the tempestuous fury of the passions it would provoke, reminding Alfonso of the almost mortal violence of his grief on the tragical death of the Duke of Gandia. Neither had they any tangible proofs to allege; and it was very possible that Cæsar would be driven to desperation, and his secret influence and open power, and the resources of his ferocious genius, might produce some extraordinary and destructive explosion. The pontiff already mistrusted him, and the declaration of the Ferrara alliance would strike awe into the confederate barons, and prevent all necessity of confiding to him the powers which he was so likely to abuse. The only triumph which Lucrezia would permit her lover to enjoy was the confusion of the Orsini and their secret ally, when on the following day he should, without warning or explanation, make the proposals from Ferrara public; after which her fears for his safety could only be satisfied by his solemn promise to depart secretly for Lombardy, thence to demand her in form, and make preparations to aid the pontiff, if assistance should be necessary. The desire which he pas-

sionately urged to reveal his name and rank, and wed her immediately, filled her with a terror which could only be appeased by this promise, and which the direful tragedies of so many victims of Cæsar's unnatural rivalry might well arouse. She would not even suffer that the pontiff should be made acquainted with the truth until he was beyond the reach of accident, alleging the innumerable and crafty spies with whom Alexander was surrounded, to whose scrutiny his impetuous passions and impulses continually laid him open. Moreover, Lucrezia wrung from her lover, as a proof that he had laid aside all jealousy, that he would leave the rebuking of Sir Reginald to herself, who she was satisfied had been deceived in some similar manner, by the treachery of Faustina, as he had himself been in the valley of Egeria. She related most touching tales of the young knight's honourable struggles with his passion, and of her own cruel use of it to misdirect suspicion, and even expressed her belief that in obeying Faustina's summons he had really hoped to have the resolution to plead for the Orsino; tales which might have moved Alfonso to pity; but the still uncalmed heavings of his jealousy, and the delirium of passion, suggested an ungenerous advantage to be gained by compliance with those gentle entreaties.

It might be that the lady guessed at the nature of her lover's thoughts, which his tremulous gestures and the fire in his eyes betrayed; for with the divine instinct of that natural modesty of the sex which is scarcely ever obliterated, even in the vilest of it, her own manner grew colder and more reserved. She laboured to change the discourse, sweet as was to her that rhapsody of burning eloquence in which Alfonso atoned for his long silence. But the apprehensions which dictated this change of demeanour were in themselves dangerously suggestive; his words became strangely vague and random, and yet he continued to gaze with a kind of fierceness at Lucrezia, while half in fear, and half in hope to divert his thoughts, she laboured to win from him an assurance that he would in nowise molest Le Beaufort.

"No, my Lucrezia! unless I have assurance on which my soul can rest secure, I dare not suffer aught to breathe that envies me my treasure!" he exclaimed. "Be mine wholly, and I take Heaven and earth to witness that thou art my bride, my wife, my soul, my essence, my infinity of love, all that I am and all that ever I can be! But be mine! and I will believe in thee against the angels!"

"Nay, now, indeed, thou provest, love, that thou dost not love me, but hatest and despisest me even to thy soul's core!" replied Lucrezia, weeping, and in a terrified manner endeavouring to release herself from the arm with which he circled her. But the very humility and supplication of her look, and attitude of submissive entreaty, gave her beauty a more irresistible charm than in its brightest blaze of power and victory.

"Fear not! thou art my wife, my Lucrezia, my existence! Fear not, my sweetness! I will but repay that gentle Egerian kiss, flimsy as lightning!"

"Swear then to leave me on the instant. Nay, till thou swearest, dearest Alfonso!—I am all thine, but do not debase thy wife to be the thing her foes have called her!" she exclaimed, and gliding from his embrace she sank on her knees before him, in an attitude of mingled fear and supplication.

"Thou!—kneeling whence I should never rise! Oh, they have belied thee, my Lucrezia, for I know thou lovest me! Yes, I swear it! But one instant to obliterate that churlish recollection of the valley of Egeria!"

But one farewell glimpse of heaven, and I will leave thee!" said Alfonso, rallying all the strength of his chivalrous and honourable spirit. And raising her with passionate tenderness, the Hospitaller pressed his soul with his lips on those whose sweetness had truly never left haunting his own, and certes with most ample retaliation, for it seemed as if the deep draught of passion could never be satiated with their crimson nectar. Loving so passionately, and of a nature so fraught with the glowing sun of her land, what marvel that Lucrezia, in the first movement of ecstatic tenderness, wreathed her fair arms round his neck, and met the pressure with almost equal fervour? Nay, and it might be that it was rather her knowledge of her lover's character, than motives which might actuate the purer and colder daughters of the north, which almost simultaneously induced her to start from his arms, and touch a silver bell, which lay on the couch beside her, exclaiming "Faustina!" But already the duenna was in the chamber; and affecting to rub her eyes and yawn, she pointed to the casement, at which the first beams of dawn had for some time paled the moonlight. Both instantly assumed, though not very successfully, the cold and distant manner befitting their supposed relation; and satisfied that the ancient dame had overheard little of their conversation, since she assumed an air of infinite discretion and reproof towards her nursling, the envoy took a more sober farewell, and retired with one last, laughing, and yet most passionate glance of love, and pride, and gratitude, and playful mockery from his betrothed.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"If this be triumph, what call ye defeat?"—*Ilfracombe.*

The Sala Regia was prepared for the festival in which was to be decided the dispute of the tournament of the Colosseum. Yet, festival as it might be, it was felt, though not acknowledged, that something of foreboding and gloom mingled with all the pomp and splendour of the scene. The guard on the pontifical palace was noted to be unusually numerous; and the musters of the Orsini, however speciously declared to be in honour of their young chieftain, were as significantly great.

The festival had certainly something of a military character, yet the pontiff was somewhat surprised, on entering the Sala, followed by Lucrezia and his court, to perceive that the majority of his guests were in armour. Paolo and Le Beaufort were armed at all points, excepting the head; and the former had an expression of wild gaiety on his pallid features contrasting in a very unwonted manner with the gloom in Le Beaufort's.

Paolo fixed his eyes eagerly on Lucrezia, hoping, no doubt, to feast them with traces of the suffering and degradation to which he believed she had been subjected in the Hospitaller's disdain. But his heart glowed as if with living fire when he saw her enter, her face beaming with delight and satisfaction, all her motions undulating as if to some inward music of enjoyment and happiness. But when the Hospitaller entered, for the first time arrayed in a rich court garb, which displayed the kingly grandeur of his person in a new light, his consternation was completed on discerning that, instead of the glances of ire which ought to have been exchanged, their eyes sought each other's and met in an electric shock,

and Lucrezia's sparkled with a warmer lustre, and a mystic smile played like a butterfly over the deepening roses of her cheeks.

Messer Bembo followed his lord, but with a satisfactorily dismal expression; for, in some chastisement of the canon's platonism, Alfonso had informed him of the dangerous position in which he was likely to be placed, without hinting at his means of extrication.

A stately ceremonial was gone through, which finally left the three competitors standing before the elevated chair on which Lucrezia sat, as Queen of the Quest, surrounded by the fair jury who assisted, or at least confirmed her judgment.

It was the etiquette in these secular exhibitions to take no formal notice of the pontiff's presence. Lucrezia, therefore, commenced her address with only a gentle smile at her sire, and a bent to the assembly, which was returned with deep homage; and though tinged with the rhetorical forms of the age, in any the harmony of her voice would have rendered it eloquent.

"Very dear ladies, and my lords," she began, after a slight pause; "the herald of our absolute court has informed you for what purpose we are here met, under our Lady's enlightenment, and by the rules of chivalry, to adjudge who hath deserved best of these very valiant knights. Women we are, indeed, and therefore by some may be deemed but little competent to weighty judgments. But nature, that denied us both strength and valour, gave us so deep an admiration of those qualities—rendered them so needful to us—that we are even like the lovers of arts, who, having neither prejudice nor rivalry, are oft better judges in them than the professors themselves. Moreover, we are artists in this, that women were those who wrought the rough ore of strength and valour into the glories of chivalry, melting it in the fire of love: refining it with generosity, humility, and all mercifulness; welding it in the ice-cold temper of chastity and forbearance; polishing it with tenderness, grace, honour, and courtesy—making it indeed but religion in panoply of steel. Yet be it as it may, we are women, and as women we must judge.

"Not only, therefore, ye are to learn, lords and valiant gentlemen, decide we on the valour, but on the worthiness of the deeds, and doers. Therefore the noble Lord Orsino will pardon us, that we cannot deem his share in the surprise of Capua eclipses the merit of his rivals—a surprise that poured forth torrents of blood which might have been spared—the blood of women, too, and of the children of women! Yet there are no mothers among your judges, Lord Paolo!"

"Even so;—but they may chance to become so with but common luck, Lady Lucrezia!" interrupted the Orsino, in a voice of such sullen mockery, with so strong an emphasis on the name that there was a silence of utter astonishment in the audience.

"Sir Reginald of England!" continued Lucrezia, turning away with flashing eyes, but with a beseeching gesture to Alfonso, who had put his hand on his sword. "Listen!—the discourse is now of you! All of us are agreed that, inasmuch as you entered Capua in fair war, sword in hand, the first, nay, the only one—the prize should be yours. But, knight, there is a foul stain on your shield, which first much be effaced. You have rendered yourself unworthy of all chivalric recompense by basely traducing the fair fame of a noble lady!—ay, Tarquin-like, by accusing her of a crime to which you disloyally and vainly endeavoured to seduce her!"

"This is gospel-truth in all but the failure!" exclaimed the Orsino, laughing loudly. "Speak, friend of an unmatched dye! tell us all where thou didst spend the night of the quest, and how!—at least so much as thou canst without bringing blushes to this chaster Lucrezia's cheek!"

"Answer him, knight! not only before all this presence but before that above!" returned Lucrezia, passionately. "Answer him, I command you, for I—even I am she who accuse you of a most false and perjurous calumny!"

"And remember that it was to me the boast was made, that this lady had granted you on that night a secret interview in the Vatican," said Alfonso.

"Courage, youth! 'tis but to avow thy boyish vaunting," said Cæsar, suddenly interposing.

It needed but this climax to make the passions raging in Sir Reginald's breast burst all restraints.

"No, Duke of Romagna! no, false knight, and faithless prince!" he exclaimed. "Rather I confess before all this presence what thou didst avouch to me yesterday, with purpose to awe me into betraying the secrets of the Orsini, that thyself suborned the false hag who lured me whither I went with a hope which I dared not whisper to myself—a hope which was madness and treachery and all disloyalty!—whose penalty I partly paid in the bitter mockery of that night's fruitless expectation, or will now abide, even to the worst your hatred, lady, can ordain!"

"Tush!—is it all of the silly jest I played to rebuke your sillier presumption, boy?" said Cæsar, laughing as if with mingled surprise and gaiety—but the laugh was solitary.

"Thou, thou, Cæsar! hast dared to play this jest, as thou callest it, with me, with thy sister's name!" shouted Alexander, with a fury which seemed likely to boil over every restraint, when, luckily for Cæsar, it was diverted into another channel.

"Though it be even so, yet thou! thou, Hospitaller!" exclaimed Paolo, staring like one possessed of fiends. "Hast thou nought to declare wherefore even the despised Orsino is now content to withdraw all aspiration to this illustrious lady's hand?"

"Certes, since I kneel here in the name of Alfonso of Ferrara, humbly to offer to her acceptance a suitor with whom no Orsino may dare to contend," returned the knight, kneeling with profound homage at Lucrezia's feet.

"Now all the saints, let us hold our breath, and wake from this strange dream!" exclaimed Cæsar, in a wonder-struck tone. "Messer Bembo, speak! are we not fooled with these fine words? What power hath this man from the princes of Ferrara?"

"Even all he claims, my lord!" was the decisive reply of the amazed platonist.

"But thou, Lucrezia!—what answerest thou?" said the duke with inexpressible alarm and surprise.

"Speak, freely, Lucrezia! marches not thy consent abreast with ours, which most gladly confirms thee to Ferrara?" said Alexander, with a glare at the Orsino like that of a lion about to spring.

"As truly as I now accept this ring, which I would it were of adamant, never to be broken but by death!" said Lucrezia. "As truly as that I—and all this fair quest—find that the true praise of chivalry is due only to this noble and unstained knight, and to him adjudge the crown of the tournament of the Colosseum."

And pronouncing the words, she accepted from the kneeling Hospitaller a costly ring of diamonds, while a herald placed the long disputed wreath of victory on his brow. The pontiff immediately arose, and with a triumph and exultation which he took no pains to conceal, pronounced his benediction on the betrothal.

“It is excellently well, but not yet is the fiat gone forth irrevocably,” said Paolo, with a delirious laugh. “Faithful ambassador! I shall care that the praises of your management precede you to Ferrara!—Meanwhile, if your grace of Romagna cares to know wherefore we do not envy the duke his prize, we will tell you a sphinx’s riddle, of how sharing guilt proves innocence.”

“We will have you, then, and the barons of your alliance, share your guilt and prove your innocence by forming immediately the siege of Bologna,” said the pontiff, in his most tempestuous tones. “Wherein you will be aided, at any need, by the arms of our potent and obedient son, the Duke of Ferrara; upon which we command you immediately, under the banner of the Confalonier, to march with all your forces from Rome, and commission the Duke of Romagna to execute our order within two sunsets. And for thee, audacious English boy!—if at this sunset which approaches, thou, or any of thy followers, are found in Rome, we will keep ye there as long as the walls of Santangelo are strong enough for the purpose.”

And without any other formality of dismissal, and without taking any other notice of Cæsar, Alexander arose, and leaning on the Hospitaller’s shoulder with one hand, while he led his daughter with the other, retired—leaving the whole assembly staring in dumb amazement at one another.

“Nay, shrink not from mine eye!” said Paolo at last, as the shame-struck Knight of England turned slowly away. “I desire no other vengeance on thee, than to hear what I can reveal. Gonfalonier, we may at least discuss with you what force we are expected to furnish to your siege of Bologna. Lend me your arms, ye faithful friends and allies!”

And with a strangely vehement action he thrust his arms into those of Cæsar and Le Beaufort, and hurried them almost involuntarily to the extremity of the hall. Overwhelming as were the news revealed, to Le Beaufort, it was remarkable that he made no comment, but with a sigh as it seemed of utter despair withdrew ere Cæsar gave vent to the prodigious emotion which convulsed his whole frame, and which far surpassed even the feelings of a brother, on a revelation which the Orsino’s gloss confirmed into one of irretrievable dishonour.

Unconscious or indifferent to any consequences which could now ensue from the conjunction of his enemies, the Prince of Ferrara accompanied the pontiff to his apartment, and received, with what delight may be imagined, a command to pass the remainder of the day with himself and the newly betrothed.

This first happy day of Alfonso’s love, and the happiest of his life, passed away with marvellous rapidity. Alexander approved of the envoy’s project of returning on the following day with the report of his success to Ferrara; and he took so much pleasure in discussing the minutest preliminaries to be adjusted, that although the Datary arrived about nightfall, and sued for an audience on the most important business, it was long ere Alexander retired to grant it. He left the envoy with Lucrezia and her ladies, and seldom was there a company more delighting or delighted, abandoned to its own resources. In her anxiety to leave her memory brightly

impressed on her lover's heart, Lucrezia displayed all her infinite charms of beauty and genius so profusely, that the intoxication of his pleasure became at length a species of pain in the unsatisfied aching of the senses which it kindled. There was something even of relief mingled with his regret, when a messenger entered to summon Lucrezia to the pontiff's presence alone; and yet their leave-taking occupied so long a minute, that another and more impatient command followed ere she obeyed. And very shortly after, word was brought to the ladies to attend their mistress, and an intimation to the envoy that she would not be visible again that night.

To indulge in the delight of musing over the new treasures of hopes and lover-fancies he had collected in this long interview, Alfonso strolled into the gardens of the palace: and turning into one of the more secluded walks, he suddenly heard a hobbling step after him, looked round, and beheld an aged and withered crone, in a Jewish garb, who overtook and immediately prostrated herself at his feet. It was Morta; but at first his preoccupied memory scarcely recognised her, until the tones of the raven-like voice fell upon his ear.

"Hist, son!—I bear a secret matter," said the hag, rising. "But first, that you may believe in me, know you this Nazarene amulet, which I bring as a token from one who learned to trust in you at Capua?"

"I have seen it ere now," said Alfonso, suspiciously, but recognising the plain silver cross of a nun, which Fiamma Colonna wore with superstitious care round her neck, among all her richer ornaments—sole relic of the past.

"The lady of your people, to whom this cross belongs, who, albeit of the skilled, hath oft sought the aidance of our powers, and who has now taken refuge on our hearth in the Ghetto, confiding in the faith and gratitude which we owe to her, from divers her enemies, more fearful than hissing snakes!—sends you this token, and by it adjures you to see her in all haste and secrecy, to devise some means by which she may fly beyond their coil and darting fangs," said Morta. "Or if it be not among things permitted or possible, that she should escape from the destroyer's power, at least she would confide to you a matter which concerns even the life of the high priest's daughter, whom ye call Lucrezia Borgia."

Alfonso had no reason to place any trust in his Jewish suppliant; but this message was so probable, and supported by circumstances which she could not have known apparently but from Fiamma's information, that he could scarcely doubt it. Accordingly, the final statement, coupled with his knowledge of Cæsar's desperation and remorseless character, excited his apprehensions to the highest degree. At the same time his gratitude and compassion were powerfully excited by learning Fiamma's peril, which she had incurred for his advantage, augmented by the reasonable doubts to be entertained of the fidelity of those whom she had been compelled to trust. He rapidly considered the possibility of withdrawing her from Rome, under protection of his own escort, on the following day; and after many inquiries, which satisfied him of the reality of the old woman's statement, who also seemed to be in panic terror lest their conference should be overheard, he resolved on accompanying her to Fiamma's refuge. His usually darkly-garbed person, he thought, would run little risk of being recognised in the courtly array in which he was now bedizened, with the addition of the general nocturnal vizard and cloak worn by the gallants at a period when innumerable feuds rendered almost every third man an enemy. He took care, moreover, not to lose sight

of the Jewess, gave no intimation of his purpose of sallying forth to the attendants in the palace, who might have betrayed it, and proceeded with Morta to a private exit of the Vatican on the Tiber, and called a boat. Somewhat ominously the boatman proved to be Giorgio Schiavone. The old man seemed older now than ever, or more taciturn; he took scarcely any notice of his fare, and probably did not recognise him.

Landing at the Ghetto, Morta hobbled up to the knight, and not altogether counterfeiting the anxiety she displayed, she implored him not to reveal it if she guided him into the Ghetto by a much nearer way than skirting the walls to the gate—with a chance of being refused admittance, as it was past the legal hour. With a vague misgiving, whose warnings he despised to his cost, Alfonso heard her propose the watercourse which he had formerly discovered, and which she declared was now so low as scarcely to wet over the sole of a foot. Yet he consented, and they entered the narrow gangway with great facility, the Jewess leading the way; and they proceeded by the dim light which fell from between the walls, until he imagined they were near the dwelling of the sorceresses, when he heard a loud crash behind. He had scarcely time to turn in alarm to ascertain what had happened ere streams of light blazed down upon him from various unsuspected holes in the lofty walls of the enclosure, and innumerable Hebrew physiognomies, all instinct with malice and rage, appeared at them. A storm of hootings and revilings and cries for vengeance assailed his ears like the shrieks of discordant birds in an Indian forest. Arquebuses and cross-bows were levelled at him from many points, and he perceived that the waters were rising rapidly, and that an iron grill had descended between him and the exit. At this formidable minute the door of the Jewesses' house flew open, and Miriam appeared shrieking “Francesco!” with delirious and despairing iteration. Morta called to the knight to take refuge, and ran up the stairs, seizing Miriam in her arms and forcing her violently away. Alfonso made but one spring into the vault after her, which was in total darkness, and suddenly he felt himself seized on all sides. He attempted to draw his sword, but it was snatched from the sheath behind, and at the instant when he gave himself up to destruction, light flashed in, and he found himself completely hemmed in by a throng of Hebrews, the majority armed, and all raging with imprecations and fury.

Treachery and Cæsar were ideas which rushed simultaneously upon Alfonso's mind, and he expected nothing but immediate destruction; but, to his surprise, the infuriate throngs became suddenly still, and an ancient Jew tottered from the ranks, quivering and coughing with age and fury. “Yield thee, accursed Nazarene! betrayer of the daughters of the people!—yield thee, that would bring on us the vengeance of thee greedy Ammonite! Bind him and lead him before the Senator, as the Threatener commanded, without delay—even by the gate which opens on the Orsini square, where wait his officers and the accursed Inquisitor,” he yelled.

Somewhat relieved by finding that there was no immediate purpose of assassination, but not in the least relishing the ulterior prospect, Alfonso vehemently protested his innocence, and appealed to Morta, whose sister had dragged Miriam out.

“Man of Gath! dog of mine enemy! shall I witness for thee that hast betrayed our father's blood to shame, and the judgment that is upon it!” shrieked Morta. “Accursed be thou and all thy tribe; and blessed be they who in any manner contribute to thy and their destruction!”

"Away with him; he is the goat of atonement to the Nazarene!" continued the old Jew, vehemently. "He hath no part in Israel. Let them judge the Christian by the Christian law."

"Ay, let them impale him living as they did my son—my Reuben!" yelled another elder. "Let him linger as he did until sunset—until the vultures were so hungry they would no longer delay; and the Nazarene suffered me neither to drive them away, nor wet his blackening lips with water!"

This dreadful reminiscence, and the agony of the old man's grief, rekindled the capturers to so furious a wrath, that it was only by urging upon them the positive commands they had received, that the elder hindered them from proceeding to instant vengeance. Alfonso himself felt that his only hope of redemption was in present submission; but while he was expostulating with his capturers a guard of halberdiers belonging to the Senator of Rome made their entry. He took some hope from the sight, especially as young Fabio Orsino was among them, instantly declared that he was the envoy of Ferrara, and demanded protection in the pontiff's name. But the youth's only answer was a wild laugh of derision and hatred, and an order to the Jews to come immediately with their complaint and prisoner before the tribunal of his brother, an order which was instantly obeyed.

Meanwhile, no good or evil angel whispered any tidings of these events in the Vatican. Fraught with the nectar of the delicious passion which now pervaded her whole voluptuous nature, Lucrezia had obeyed the pontiff's summons, not without some surprise, which was deepened when on entering his presence she observed the agitation of his countenance and manner. Fixing his eyes upon her with a sternness which she had never yet found in them, Alexander somewhat accounted for his wrath by declaring that a report had been brought to him of a calumny invented by the Orsini, which rendered it advisable that she should not see the envoy of Ferrara again. Observing her vivid blush, and the warmth with which she protested against so strange a submission, Alexander's suspicions were probably strengthened. Moreover, Lucrezia dared not question what had been reported, lest it should entail some dangerous explanations; and her silence and confusion told but little in her favour. The second message was immediately despatched by the pontiff's command; but not satisfied with this precaution, and contrary to his custom, he detained Lucrezia until a late hour, affecting to be absorbed in a game of chess with her, which his Spanish skill enabled him to protract almost at pleasure.

Tidings of a tumult in the Ghetto, and of the seizure of a Christian visiting some Jewish paramour in it, arrived; but little notice was taken of it, the Senator himself having quieted the disturbance, and taken cognizance of the offence. But even when at length Lucrezia was permitted to retire, Alexander gave orders in her presence that the envoy of Ferrara should expect a visit from him very early, that he might bestow some last instructions. Stung at heart with the suspicion which she vaguely discerned in all these movements, Lucrezia paused as she reached the threshold of the chamber in hesitation, whether to return and confide all or not—when the expression of the Datary's eyes, whose doubtful faith she knew, restrained her.

Lucrezia's misgivings were much increased when, on retiring to her apartments, she found that her nurse was not in attendance, and that the

most vigilant inquiry could not ascertain what had become of her. Her agitation made even the thought of rest unpleasing to her, and she dismissed her attendants without suffering them to fulfil their usual offices; and daybreak found her still engaged in a reverie which, however sweet, brought frequent tears to her eyes. The tranquillity of the dawn diffused itself over her exhausted spirits, and she resigned herself to the slumber which now visited her even as she sat, until she was startled by a summons to attend the pontiff immediately, who desired to see her at the same time with the envoy of Ferrara.

Lucrezia was somewhat surprised, but unwilling to appear before her lover so pale and exhausted as she now imagined she looked, she sent an excuse—to which a positive and imperative command was returned. The tremulous manner of the page who brought the message, and her own apprehensions, banished every other consideration from Lucrezia's mind, and she hurried in her unchanged attire to Alexander's presence; and on entering she was amazed and alarmed in the highest degree by his first words, demanding of her what had become of the Knight of St. John! He had disappeared from his apartment ever since sunset, and Messer Bembo, pale and trembling as a blanched winter leaf, was there to affirm the certainty of the intelligence.

The fear and utter consternation of Lucrezia apparently increased the anger of the pontiff to an uncontrollable degree. He declared his intention of seeking for him himself, and ascertaining for what reason it pleased him to conceal himself in the palace, and then without any apparent connexion he commanded *Mona Faustina* to be sent for. Lucrezia somewhat falteringly announced her disappearance, and Alexander's agitation visibly increased.

“Why then—where is he?” he exclaimed, in a tone of his terrible voice which made even Lucrezia tremble. “It cannot be, though we have of late heard strange stories of his licentious hypocrisy—Fiamma, the young Jewes!—dost thou hear, Lucrezia?”

“My señor, I dare aver, upon my life and honour, these are foul calumnies invented by his enemies to poison your ear against him!” said Lucrezia, with great warmth.

“Good troth, they tell us that even last night—hearken, Lucrezia!” said Alexander, waving to Bembo to retire, who affrightedly obeyed. “Hearken!” he continued, trembling with passion. “Thy Faustina!—a tale was told me—and she has fled to the Orsini for refuge. Bears sheaught on her lips which enemies would joy to hear? Wretch! where is the Knight of St. John?”

“Would to all blessed saints, my lord, I knew, that I might feel the assurance of his safety,” replied Lucrezia, with a vehemence which staggered the suspicions of her wrathful sire.

“And yet,” he said, after a pause, “and yet what means that deepening and ever-deepening blush? Lucrezia! listen—for I will know the worst!—and must, perchance, to save our name from a matchless ignominy! They tell me now—nay, they have proved it by some evidence—that the Hospitaller's errand here was to discover matter to prevent rather than conclude this alliance with his masters. The English knight, it seems, did formerly avouch it. And they tell me—they tell me—Lucrezia! Lucrezia! if thou art indeed the wretch I will not call thee, at least tell me in time to prevent the traitor's return with his boast to Ferrara, to overwhelm us all with everlasting shame and laughter.”

"My father! what would this say?" returned Lucrezia, completely aghast.

"Girl! thou canst save his life but by one means—by yielding him to my mercy! Or wilt thou force me to proclaim all, and break into thy chambers with my Swiss?" shouted Alexander.

Lucrezia's silence of indignation, shame, and grief seemed to confirm her sire's suspicions, and completely vanquish him. He seated himself as if too dizzy to stand, and covered his face with his hands, exclaiming, "This is indeed punishment!"

"Kill me, but do not doubt me thus, señor!" said Lucrezia at last, in a dreamy tone, as if scarce believing in what she heard, and overwhelmed with apprehensions of some indistinct but mighty mischief. And it was at this instant that Burciardo entered, who quiveringly announced that two wretched old women from the Ghetto had arrived at the palace, and demanded with such strange words to be admitted to the presence of the magnificent Domina that he had come to learn her pleasure in the matter.

Alexander gave his daughter no time to refuse, by ordering the Jewesses to be admitted instantly; and all further discussion was cut short by the return of Burciardo with Notte and Morta, who either observed not, or took no heed of the presence of the pontiff in their precipitation, but rushed to Lucrezia, seized hold of her robes, and beating their breasts shrieked to her for aid in a wild sea-fowl chorus.

"We gave thee the precious potion which won thy lover's love!" yelled Morta. "Be merciful in turn. It is in our house the Nazarene is seized! But, lady, you pitied our child, and said it was a holy deed to bring back to comfort her despair the seducer of her youth whom her madness mourned as dead—slain—murdered! We have done no more!"

"True, he is rich, and lavish of his wealth, as a soldier should be," said Notte, with a terrible grin. "But, most beauteous lady! if thou wilt favour him and us, here is the noblest of his gifts—these priceless gems which he shared in the plunder of Capua—they are thine!"

"The wreath of the tournament!" exclaimed Lucrezia, bewildered with terror and astonishment, as, weeping and wailing, the hag laid at her feet a crown of superb diamonds. "Why, what is this—the Christian!—who hath stolen these precious gems to give them to his paramour?"

"None, none—but be secret, lady!" returned Notte, and the rest was uttered simultaneously, as if the hags grudged each other so sweet a morsel of revenge. "Be secret!—for he is a monkish knight—a Knight of the White Cross of that John whom the Nazarenes call Saint!"

Lucrezia uttered a half-stifled shriek, and glancing frantically at Alexander, she exclaimed, "He is *not* in your palace, then.—But where is he?—devilish women!"

"He is conveyed—a prisoner—out of Rome; the Senator himself sat on him, in judgment:—nor can we learn what hath become of him, nor of our child, our Miriam," said Morta.

"The Senator! the Orsino! a prisoner!" gasped Lucrezia, staggering and falling at her sire's feet as senseless as if dead.

When she recovered perception, almost the first object her gaze encountered was Cæsar, assiduously engaged in administering restoratives.

"Is he slain? have you murdered him, butcher?" she shrieked. "Speak! and let my heart burst!—Is he dead?"

"This frenzy indeed confirms the Orsino's bewildering tale! said Cæsar, quailing beneath the fierceness of her eyes, which flashed like mad diamonds.

"Murderer! take off thy bloody hands, and tell me if he lives; if not, I speak, and reveal thee to heaven and earth the monster that thou art!" she cried with unimaginable fury.

"He is *not* dead!—no harm has befallen him!—she raves!" said Cæsar, hurriedly. "Alas! and the warning came too late! His unhallowed lusts have placed him in the Orsino's power, and he has used it to our dishonour, and sent the envoy a prisoner to Ferrara to his abused sovereigns, with full proof of his treason—unless the jest was of their invention.—And woe the day—of our shame and thine!"

So utter was the astonishment into which this amazing combination of events, so counteractive to all the purposes of the planners, plunged Lucrezia, that she stared for several moments in silence. Mistaking the nature of the thoughts which apparently overwhelmed her, Cæsar could not forbear a bitter laugh; but to his surprise in turn it was echoed by Lucrezia.

"And the detected seducer of the Hebrew's daughter, that was said to be murdered by a felon whose like hath not been on earth since Cain!" she said, dissembling her real agony as much as possible under the appearance of another. "Señor! I beseech you, if ever you loved my mother's daughter, let the villain be brought back, and suffer the full penalties of his enormous crime—for what vengeance hath he to fear from the Dukes of Ferrara for a guilt which they have contrived—or Cæsar lies!"

"Dios, Dios! justly hast thou punished the vile father by giving him viler children!" exclaimed Alexander, in despairing accents, for his emotion had passed all violence. "And righteously is my crime my punishment!"

"The Hospitaller's chastisement may be safely left to his lords, since even it suffices the Orsino's vengeance," replied Cæsar. "But to bring him back were impossible, unless the messenger rode the wind. It is dawn, and he was borne from Rome with the swiftest horse that hate could harness but an hour after sunset and his detection."

"Is it impossible, utterly impossible to overtake them?" said Lucrezia, with a wondrous light breaking on her fair visage. "Let him to his punishment, then, in Ferrara.—And I remain to mine in Rome; but, señor, and my father, do not condemn me unheard. Let the Senator be sent for, and utter mine accusation, and if I answer it not to convince all, let me perish without a tear even from my father!"

"The Senator is no further remote than Santangelo, whither he came at my entreaty, on receiving hostages of our blood," said Cæsar. "But what avails to feed his revenge and exultation in our visible despair?"

"Let him come, nathless," replied Lucrezia, and Cæsar looked at her as if he doubted she was delirious. But no objection was made—Alexander raising his face from his robe, in which he had concealed his agony of grief, with a somewhat revived expression. A messenger was sent for the Orsino.

"Nay, let none stir," said Lucrezia, observing that the Jewesses were crawling out on their knees. "Ye shall not to your Ghetto with half tales of me—whereof too many are abroad; and ye shall think more fairly of your grandchild ere ye return to your poisons. Be not amazed, Cæsar! Let me but know the certainty of these ancient women's legend, and then am I content to share whatever fate befalls the Lombard envoy. Messer Bembo was his colleague, and should be witness of his detection; let him too come hither."

Alexander himself began to fear that his daughter was maddened with her fears; but her firm and tranquil tone was at variance with the sup-

position. No long delay took place in the Orsino's arrival, who entered accompanied by the three magistrates who composed his tribunal, two inquisitors, and a notary. The joy of his vengeance was calm with its very excess; and he entered with all the ceremonious humility usual in an audience with the sovereign pontiff.

"Lord senator," said Lucrezia, after an instant's struggle of warring feeling, "how is it that you have dared to set aside the laws of Rome, that should the most have enforced them, and removed from the dread vengeance which they denounce on the crime of which he stood convict before you, the Knight of St. John?"

"Ha, lady! doth it stir your wrath so bitterly to find the trade of our orthodox and warm-blooded Roman women thus heathenly meddled in?" said the Orsino, with a fearful smile. "But the Senator of Rome has a higher office than merely to administer her laws, if the public safety be the highest. And assuredly the alliance with Ferrara is of so much consequence to it, as to justify my removal of a rogue who was likely to ruin all, where he may abide the penalty of his machinations."

"'Tis a fair mock, but let it be a plain one," returned Lucrezia.

"What! and hast thou not even the harlot's grace to clamour when they call her by her name!" thundered Alexander.

"Even as you will, illustrious lady. Master notary, read Mona Faustina's confession in our presence ere she departed to witness it in Ferrara," replied the Orsino, quivering with impatience and triumph. The notary trembled and looked affrightedly at Alexander, but Lucrezia gave a gesture commanding him to read the paper; and dropping on both knees, he obeyed.

Mona Faustina, having doubtless fled at Cæsar's threats or instruction, had confessed all that she knew, witnessed, or suspected of the interview on the previous night; which, although it alleged no positive guilt, gave ample room for inference of future danger; for the declarant stated that until of late she had always understood, and indeed known by many circumstances, and the complaints of her lady, that the envoy had used his commission continually against Lucrezia until this interview, in which some compact seemed made between them which produced the proposal on the following day. Faustina related her interruption, and in fact all the particulars of the scene except the words, which she could not overhear, so minutely that Lucrezia's very eyes were coloured with her blush, and the pontiff groaned aloud.

"And therefore I deemed that the alliance might be balked but for a timely removal; and if I tracked him to his haunts I did but a duty which had else been impossible, signor," said the Orsino.

"Villain! prodigious traitor!" exclaimed Cæsar, no longer able to disguise his triumph. "And among all his crimes I deem it basest—the use which he made of his Jewish paramour to spread black suspicions against myself—for my heart swells even to bursting to declare, that ever I perceived how all his shafts in the dark were aimed at me."

"Your holiness may now discern that, without meaning any treason, I may once and for ever cease in my despised suit," said the Orsino, with a calm smile of concentrated vengeance.

"Yea; I recognise the hand in it. Francesco—murdered!—Cæsar, a plotting rebel!—and Lucrezia!—Oh, thou worst of all thy wicked sex! what art thou?" groaned the overwhelmed sire.

"Señor, your daughter, and the betrothed of Alfonso of Ferrara," replied Lucrezia, calmly. "All this tale, albeit told babblingly as aged

women are wont, is true!—true, that until last night and this long interview had passed between us, the faithful envoy was resolved against the alliance which next day he perfected. For until then I knew not, and had not falsified all my brother's calumnies against me, and the dishonour his jest with the Knight of England cast on my name."

"We have yet to learn if Alfonso of Ferrara approves of the means taken to prove your innocence, lady," said Paolo.

"Wretch! dost thou even and publicly admit thy guilt?" exclaimed Alexander, despairingly.

"If it be guilt to love, most guilty I am, *señor*," continued Lucrezia, with sparkling enthusiasm. "But have I not oft heard you give the praise among all the princes of Italy to Alfonso of Ferrara, for all heroic, sovereign, and princely virtues? Would *he* wed pollution?—would he give his children a mother whose name should rightfully bring the colour to their brows? To prove, my father, mine innocence of this guilt imputed either in deed or intent!—Orsino, that the envoy whom you sent to Ferrara is no traitor!—Cæsar, that these ancient women have at least done nought to disprove the charges your fancy shaped in their grandchild's ravings!—I tell you all, nay, my father, I tell but you—the Knight of St. John is Alfonso of Ferrara himself!"

A sudden flash of sunshine in darkness does not more suddenly light up all that was vague and incomprehensible around it, than this revelation poured on the paralysed auditors. A silence ensued like that after a burst of thunder. Cæsar was the first that recovered his senses, and he spoke staggeringly.

"If this be so—after last night's adventure we shall not soon hear from Ferrara," he gasped.

"We will despatch immediate pursuit to bring him back, to compel the performance," said Alexander, gazing with a troubled eye at his daughter's supreme loveliness.

"Our Lady be praised, he is beyond pursuit, then, by the Orsino's care, for under no semblance of force would I accept his hand," said Lucrezia, with a sigh. "Let him but arrive safely—and, Cæsar, remember the catacombs of San Sebastian, and on what peril he shall not!—and on the immediate return of his ambassadors do I gage the truth or falsehood of my words, my glory or my shame."

"How long hast thou known this, Lucrezia? when in the valley of Egeria mine own ears heard him avow to thee his errand against us?" said Cæsar, starting at these ominous words.

"Ay! then indeed am I the merest fool the Borgian craft hath yet entangled!" said the Orsino, at this unconscious revelation of Cæsar's deceptions.

"Retire—all!" said Alexander, with an infinitely troubled expression. "We must know all the truth, Lucrezia! But, Orsino, since the office we have given you causes so much care and toil to you, we revoke it henceforth to ourselves, and will name some of your enemies to so unpleasing a post."

"Gaze not so wildly, Cæsar; take these hags who have vilified my lord with you to your dungeons of Santangelo, and rest content we mean you no further harm—unless further be intended us," said Lucrezia, with emphatic meaning; but even her towering spirit sank beneath the terrific expression of Cæsar's glance, and turning from him with a shudder of horror, she threw herself into her sire's outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XLVII.

“ You lovers axe I now this question,
Who hath the wersé, Arcité or Palamon?
That one may se his lady day by day,
But in prison mosie he dwellen alway.
The other where him lust may ride or go,
But sen his lady shall he never mo.”—CHAUCER.

Within the prescribed sunset Sir Reginald le Beaufort quitted Rome, to the undisguised delight of his followers, and especially of old William of Bampton. Ostensibly his journey was bound to Venice, and thither he proceeded by a somewhat unusual route through Urbino, receiving ere he left Rome, from an unknown hand, the bull which authorized his marriage with his cousin Alice.

Bampton understood in general that the way was chosen to avoid passing through Ferrara, by taking the sea at some of the ports of Umbria; and being totally unacquainted with the secrets of the confederate barons, into which, before their quarrel, the Orsino had admitted his English brother-in-arms, he could not divine for what reason his young lord halted at Urbino in the midst of a wild and disturbed country, still in a tumultuous state after its recent treacherous conquest by Cæsar Borgia. Though exempted by virtue of his large and well-armed retinue from most of the dangers and insults which might have beset an ordinary traveller, there was little to render an abode in Urbino pleasant at such a period. But Le Beaufort had always some excuse or a sullen silence to oppose to the old squire's entreaties, until suddenly and of his own accord he determined on continuing his journey.

Approaching the confines of Urbino, the knight and his escort arrived in an elevated plain below the wild mountain pass into Romagna commanded by the fortress of San Leo, which was the chief strength of Urbino, and but for Cæsar's treachery might have long baffled his violence. The ascent of the pass, wild and tortuous as it was, scarce needed the guide whom Bampton had procured. A multitude of peasants, driving oxen, sheep, wains of corn, and forage, appeared toiling up the steeps, intermingled with groups of mountaineers who brought various products of their wilder regions, and were in general well armed with spears and cross-bows. Sir Reginald seemed to take no interest in the matter, but Bampton learned that a contribution—an event by no means of uncommon occurrence under the rapacious rule of the Borgian mercenaries—had been levied on the whole of the surrounding country to supply the wants of the garrison of San Leo.

It was only when they reached a tumbril loaded with massive timbers, which a long string of buffaloes could scarcely drag up the precipitous road, that Le Beaufort made any inquiries. And then he lingered far behind his escort, and entered into a deep and long confabulation with the peasants who drove the team, the chief of whom was a powerful sunburned mountaineer whose name was Paltroni.

A tempest darkened as the English archers approached the summit of the mountain of San Leo, whence a dismal prospect was visible. To the right was a deep plain, in the midst of which arose the abrupt rock of

San Marino, crowned with its republican city. Behind lay the numerous hills which circle Urbino, resembling high waves of a dark and troubled sea ; and the whole prospect was bounded by the wastes of the Adriatic rolling infinitely away. Over the whole expanse brooded an immense storm ready to burst with the fury remarkable in the high latitudes of Italy.

San Leo towered above among its rocks and steeps. A drawbridge which spanned a ravine before the principal gate was lowered, and the gate itself was open to admit the peasants with their various contributions. The garrison seemed in all the insolence of security ; their captain, whose drunken visage and furious tones betrayed at least one quality not unusual in the soldiery of any age, was drinking on horseback with a number of his officers, examining the arrivals by a scroll which he held in his hand, and violently abusing and even striking the unhappy persons who he was pleased to consider fell short in their contributions. When this scrutiny was undergone, the contributors passed on through a tower, the portcullis of which was raised, and the walls more strictly guarded, into the interior of the fortress, where they deposited their levies, and received some form of acquittance.

As if observing the etiquette of fortresses, Le Beaufort halted his troop on reaching the drawbridge, and blew a trumpet to summon a parley. The captain was instantly startled from his occupation of goading an ox with his spear to prove that it was not so fat as his schedule ordained such animals should be ; and in his first confusion he shouted “ Treason ! ” and ordered the bridge to be raised.

Le Beaufort was well aware that he should be denied his request, both from the brutal character of the captain, Peter of Oviedo, and from the danger of admitting an armed force, since Cæsar’s garrisons in Urbino were known to be much weakened, and in parts entirely withdrawn, to serve with the contingents of the barons in the siege of Bologna. But he rode forward on the drawbridge, and very courteously entreated a night’s lodging and shelter against the coming storm in San Leo. Paltroni, meanwhile, drove his timber steadily on, and passed the knight with a stupid laugh of derision, so that the buffaloes and the masses of chained timber intervened between the captain of San Leo and his visitors.

“ Clear the way, rogues ! ” shouted Peter of Oviedo, “ and we will answer this fair request with the barking dogs above, unless the gentle damoiseau suddenly delivers us of his presence. Or, stay, what manner of armed men be ye traversing the countries of my lord, the Duke of Romagna ? ”

“ An thou wouldest learn come hither with thy lance,” retorted Sir Reginald. “ But thou liest, inhospitable churl ! to say that this castle belongs to the Duke of Romagna, who hath but stolen it, like the false and disloyal plunderer that is fit to be thy master ! ”

This retort was received with so loud a shout by the mountaineers and peasants, whom the delay had collected in masses behind Le Beaufort, and was so vehemently echoed from within, that the captain grew much alarmed, and shouted again to close the gates. Some of the soldiers goaded the buffaloes furiously on with their spears, and by this time the masses of timber were almost immediately under the gate of the fortress ; when suddenly Paltroni loosened the chains which fastened his team to their burden, snatched an axe concealed among the wood, and dashing out the brains of the nearest enemy, yelled, “ God and my lord, the Duke

of Urbino!" and rushed forward. The cry was instantly repeated in a thousand wild and discordant voices, both within and without the fortress; but those around Sir Reginald hesitated to cross the bridge, until setting his lance and shouting "St. George and the bonny broom!" he galloped forward, followed after an instant of astonishment by his valiant men-at-arms. The next moment Peter of Oviedo was dashed to the earth with a stroke as irresistible as a thunderbolt. Then suffering his lance to drop, useless in a close conflict, Le Beaufort drew his sword, and Saint George himself never raged more destructively among a paynim host than he among the soldiers of the Borgia.

The conflict, though fierce, was short, for the surprise was complete; and this was the project which Paolo Orsino had long meditated as a means of restoring courage to the confederacy by tearing Urbino from Cæsar's grasp, which the general devotion of the people to their dispossessed duke, and the withdrawal of Cæsar's troops, rendered feasible. He had concluded that all hope from it was over, and that Sir Reginald had betrayed the plan to Cæsar; but acquainted with the intents, means, and passwords of the party, Le Beaufort gave in this achievement a noble refutation of the suspicion; for it was principally by his desperate courage and exertions, seconded by those of Paltroni, a valiant soldier secretly in the service of the banished duke, that in a short time the fortress was in the hands of the assailants. Of all the garrison only a few whom Sir Reginald saved, among whom was the captain, escaped the pitiless vengeance which their cruelty and exactions had provoked.

The difficulty was now to keep what they had gained; and Sir Reginald took charge of the fortress with his disciplined forces, while Paltroni spread the news in every direction, and roused the whole country to revolt. Sir Reginald himself was engaged in causing the timber to be removed from the drawbridge, which he no longer desired to obstruct, when he performed, for the first time, the honours of his castellainship to a singular visitant. A figure crossed the drawbridge, and fell spent at his feet like an exhausted deer—a negro, whose black skin was foamy white with froth, whose tongue hung flabbing to his chin, whose eyes were rimmed with blood, and whose frame palpitated with fatigue. He had scarcely strength to draw a letter from his belt ere he became insensible. Bampton recognised him as the Duke of Romagna's runner, commonly styled "the Strangler; and Le Beaufort, laughingly calling all to witness that the missive was addressed to the captain of San Leo, opened it.

Le Beaufort, however, speedily discovered that the epistle was in cypher; but his curiosity was strongly excited, and he gave orders to bring Peter of Oviedo to translate it. A lean monk, who had been that worthy's chaplain, however, declared that his principal could not read, and that he possessed the key of the cypher himself, to conduct his correspondence. To ingratiate himself with the new masters the monk worked assiduously at the task which was confided to him, and the result was certainly interesting to Sir Reginald. It contained a brief but sufficiently clear account of the Orsini seizure of the envoy of Ferrara, and the extraordinary reasons which rendered it of the highest consequence to the Borgias to prevent the execution of their plan of conveying the guilty envoy to Ferrara. The captain was therefore commanded, if, as was probable, even the unembarrassed speed of the African runner had not regained the few hours' start he had lost, and the Orsini, with their prisoner, had passed

through San Leo, whatever instructions or passport they might bear to the contrary, the castellain was to pursue at all possible speed, and rather to destroy the whole party than suffer it to proceed. But if possible the prisoner himself was to be brought back to San Leo, and guarded with a vigilance the importance of which the great reward offered by Cæsar attested, until farther instructions arrived.

This document was several times read to Sir Reginald ere he could bring himself to credit the facts it revealed. And then having satisfied himself by inquiries that the African runner had indeed regained the start by his wonderful speed, and headed the destined prey, but certainly only by a short distance—without hinting at his knowledge of the prisoner's real rank, and in a tumult of soul which scarcely left him power to shape any definite resolution, he sent forth scouts in every direction, with orders to bring the Orsini and their prisoner to San Leo.

Towards evening the whole party indeed rode into the fortress; for though the Orsini had heard of the revolt and seizure of San Leo, they calculated equally on the friendship of the Urbinists and their hatred of the Borgias to permit their free passage on an errand so distasteful to the latter. Young Fabio Orsino commanded the party, selected, it is probable, rather to give weight by his rank and alliance to the accusation against the envoy than as a fit leader for so delicate and perilous an enterprise. But he was accompanied by dependents on his house of ripe years and experience, and a retinue of veteran men-at-arms.

Le Beaufort purposely kept himself out of sight until the escort had dismounted, and the prisoner was conveyed to an apartment which he had ordered to be made ready for him. From a loophole in one of the towers, however, he witnessed the arrival; and his heart swelled full of mingled passions when he saw the Knight of St. John, enveloped in a coarse mantle and hood, his arms secured by an iron hoop to his waist, and locked in his saddle with chains and a padlock, but still preserving his princely stateliness and calm. A woman came also in the cavalcade, in whose woful countenance Le Beaufort recognised Mona Faustina.

Fabio Orsino was, however, somewhat surprised when he recognised in the conqueror of San Leo the Knight of the Sun, marvellously changed in the brief period which had elapsed. But believing him to be animated by the bitter hostility which Cæsar's conduct towards him had justly provoked, and his own had demonstrated, he was in nowise alarmed. On his part Le Beaufort was amazed at the change which had come over the spirit of the young Orsino; the silent and studious boy, whose gentleness and reserve were the only qualities for which he had ever noticed him, was become a demoniac of revenge and hatred against the false envoy of Ferrara. Le Beaufort felt assured, but that Fabio anticipated a dreadful doom to his prisoner from his incensed masters, that he would himself have put him to death; and this idea was too amply confirmed when, working himself into frenzy with the tale which he told of the envoy's success with Lucrezia, and the ruin of his brother's hopes, and knowing that Sir Reginald was a companion in affliction, Fabio threw himself into his arms, and in agony of grief confessed that he himself—the pale and neglected schoolboy, whose existence she had perhaps scarcely noticed—had long been devoured with a secret passion for Lucrezia!

Le Beaufort had at first intended to warn Fabio of the danger of his mission, and procure the release of the prince; but this revelation, and the certainty that the Orsini escort more than equalled his own force in

number, and that the Urbinists would desire to keep so important a hostage in their hands, if discovered, deterred him. He rapidly formed a plan, which he communicated only to the one or two of his own men who were necessary to aid him in it.

Towards midnight the prisoner was awakened from the broken slumbers in which his doubtful situation permitted him to indulge, by the gleam of a torch; and starting from his couch, he beheld what he at first thought was an apparition—a knight in complete armour, whose face was deadly pale, and which was that of Sir Reginald le Beaufort.

“Be not amazed, Don Alfonso!” said the knight, in a human though quivering voice. “I know not whether your capturers have informed you of what hath fortuned in these parts; but I am Reginald le Beaufort, and now hold this castle for the Duke of Urbino.”

“And come you then to play the assassin’s part? But your nature is indeed all changed!” said Alfonso, raising himself with a despairing glance at his pinioned arms, from which the relentless Fabio never suffered the iron hoop to be removed.

“It is a bitter word, not all unmerited, and I will bear it—yet our Lady knows, had one slain me when I accepted that false hope of paradise, the anguish of my remorse would have pardoned him!” returned Le Beaufort. “But fear not, my once brother-in-arms! I come to set you free, to redeem you from the hands of the Orsini, for assuredly some will recognise you in Ferrara, and it may be ere thou hast assistance to escape their vengeance.—Free, bnt on one condition, which thou must swear to fulfil as thou art a knight and a prince, or failing in which that thou wilt lay aside the superiority of rank, and do me right in single battle on it.”

“Name, your condition, and I will answer—but even in this extremity, as I am both, I will not be compelled to aught against mine honour!” replied Alfonso.

“Nay, but most with it,” returned Sir Reginald; and continuing with an effort which scarcely controlled his agitation. “Your strange ‘baviour in Rome, your seizure in the Ghetto, argue that Lucrezia—is already grown indifferent to you.—And if—it is enough!—but swear to me not to repay her too lavish love with ingratitude and desertion—fulfilling the black hope of Cæsar and the Orsini in her dishonour and universal ignominy—but to become as you pledged yourself, her husband and lord.”

Alfonso looked at the knight for some moments in silence, almost envying the chivalrous devotion and generosity of his love; but he replied with vehemence, “Abandon me then to mine enemies, sithence you dishonour both Lucrezia and me by this compulsion! This only I reply. By all the unstained glories of my race, if Lucrezia had yielded to the madness of the passion which I avow exhausted my soul in entreaties—though seconded by all the burning eloquence of the love which I know she bears for me—never shou’d my mistress have become my wife! Therefore, if you set me free, and I demand not her hand from Ferrara—you shall know that I am the nice-souled traitor of her too lavish love, and I will meet thee in a desert with only our swords for umpires to adjudge the wrong or the right of my resolve!”

“I am content and will believe you, for ever I have found you princely and noble,” replied Le Beaufort; and with some wrenching irons which he had brought with him he forced the iron hoop from his rival’s waist and arms.

Alfonso, meanwhile, completely vanquished by the generosity of the

English knight, and anxious to clear both himself and Lucrezia in his opinion, related what had truly led him into the Ghetto. This narrative entailed many other particulars, and seduced by the mutual intensity of the interest both took in the subject, he revealed most of the extraordinary circumstances by which he had satisfied himself of Lucrezia's innocence and of Cæsar's prodigious guilt. The revelation perhaps did Le Beaufort some service, since it convinced him of the utter hopelessness of his passion, in the warmth of that which he found Lucrezia entertained for her plighted husband. But their communications were necessarily brief and imperfect; and it was not until he reached Ferrara that Alfonso comprehended the full danger he had escaped by Le Beaufort's interposition.

Loosened from his shackles, Sir Reginald disguised his rival by lending him the armour and mantle of one of his archers; and easily led him out of the fortress, in which the exhausted capturers and the Orsini were either engaged in wassail or asleep. One of his own best steeds was in readiness beyond the walls; and there they parted, Sir Reginald delivering the prince a passport which he had compelled Peter of Oviedo to sign with his peculiar mark for the Borgias, and one of Paltroni's for the Urbinists, in case he met with any parties of either. Only a few hours' journey intervened to Ferrara, and as the road was well known to Alfonso, with these safe conducts he ran little danger if once beyond the pursuit of the Orsini. They parted—but despite the great service he had just rendered—Sir Reginald could not bring himself to return the embrace of his former friend, whose proud soul was wounded by the reserve which met his gratitude—and they parted finally in utter silence.

The escape was not known until the following morning, and all was utter amazement and suspicion until Sir Reginald publicly avowed that he had himself effected it, and declared to the astounded Orsini the peril which they had escaped in escorting such a prisoner into Ferrara, and to the Urbinists the advantage of securing the friendship, or at least preventing an open breach with so powerful a neighbour which any violence from the Orsini must have occasioned—announcing that the Knight of St. John was Alfonso of Ferrara himself! If these tidings needed any confirmation, thus certified by the prince's ancient comrade, it was brought in the arrival of Monsignor d'Enna, a prelate known to be devoted to the service of Cæsar, who had probably instructions which he thought proper to suppress on finding how matters had gone, and that he was himself a prisoner, but who fully confirmed the tidings of what had passed in Rome by pretending orders for the release and honourable treatment of the illustrious captive. In the height of his defiance and hate Sir Reginald replied by sending Monsignor d'Enna, the African runner, and Mona Fausta to the nearest of Cæsar's fortresses in Romagna, with instructions to present themselves before their chief as soon as possible, with tidings that his commands had been anticipated. Fabio Orsino was alarmed into acquiescence by the confession he had made, and the strange conduct of his English fellow-sufferer; but all cordiality and sympathy was at an end between them.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

" Hie thee hither,
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
 And chastise with the valour of my tongue
 All that impedes thee from the golden round
 Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
 To have thee crowned withal."—*Macbeth*.

The seizure of San Leo was followed by the revolt of the whole country of Urbino; and in less time than he had lost it Guidobaldo recovered his whole duchy, with the exception of two or three fortresses, to which he laid immediate siege. The entreaties of the duke, and his own thirst for vengeance, proved too powerful for all Bampton's renewed expostulations; and Le Beaufort remained the chief support of the insurrection, which his fiery zeal and courage was rapidly changing into a revolution.

The results of the events of Urbino were still more momentous than themselves. The Roman barons recovered from the panic into which they had fallen on the desertion of France and successes of Cæsar. Instead of obeying his summons to attend him in the siege of Bologna, whither he had himself been suddenly commanded by the pontiff, the vicars of the church met in a solemn diet at Magione, in Perugia, and formed an open league against the Borgias, and an engagement to assist in restoring all the dispossessed barons, and especially the Duke of Urbino. In consequence of this wise and bold resolution, the Duke of Gravina, Vitellozzo, and Oliverotto da Fermo marched with all their disposable forces into Urbino, to foil the attack of a large force despatched by Cæsar, under the command of Don Migueloto, imagining that he should easily recover the province by a sudden blow, and not dreaming of the combination entered into against him.

Cæsar himself was at Imola, apparently busied in obeying the commands of the pontiff, in preparing for the siege of Bologna, when the first shock of his changing fortune fell upon him in the news of the surprise of San Leo, and the rescue of the Prince of Ferrara. The possession of Alfonso's person would have been of incalculable political advantage to him; and on that event in great measure depended the plans which his desperation had now formed, and into which, ever since his disgrace with the pontiff, he had been elaborately and most secretly endeavouring to seduce the barons of the confederacy. But suddenly the events of San Leo overthrew all his combinations, and gave the barons courage to refuse his offers, and array themselves in open resistance to the Borgian sway, while it rendered their chief adviser, Paolo, hopeless of any advantage to be derived from his aid, and bent only on vengeance.

From a situation of seeming power and triumph a few days reduced Cæsar to one of the utmost difficulty and danger. All Italy heard with amazement that he was shut up in Imola with a scanty force, within a few hours' march of the Lords of Bologna, who were preparing to attack him, while at Perugia were gathering the forces of the southern barons, under the command of the exasperated Paolo, which at once overawed Rome, and prevented all hope of retreat upon it. Umbria in commotion, Romagna doubtful, Ferrara justly irritated, little hope of help from the French

at Milan, whose viceroy was a personal enemy to Cæsar, the Venetians his most bitter enemies, the Florentines wavering between two almost equal dislikes—the condition of Cæsar seemed to be almost desperate, when the battle of Cagli completed his misfortunes. In this action Miguelo was defeated by the Duke of Urbino, the Orsini, and Sir Reginald, with nearly the total destruction of his army, saving his own life with difficulty from the carnage.

The success of the confederates was now clearly discerned in the alarm which seized all who had any reason to dread it. Principal among these was the republic of Florence, which viewed in the triumph of the confederacy that of its exiled tyrants, the Medici. In their alarm at so rapid a revolution, and fearing that Cæsar, since his retreat was cut off on Rome, must surrender himself to the Orsini, the signory determined to send an ambassador to offer him shelter in their dominions. This office, believing that the duke entertained much liking for him, was conferred on Messer Niccolò di Bernardo Machiavelli.

A strange lull had, however, come over the operations of the confederates before Messer Niccolò reached Imola, where he scarcely hoped to find that Cæsar still ventured to remain. But on arriving in sight of the city the white banner of the church still floated on the walls, from which that of the Bentivogli, on the summit of San Pietro, was dimly visible.

The secretary of the magnificent signory was received with all the honours of a friend in need; and riding gravely through the narrow and gloomy streets he entered the principal square, in which was a large building, half palace and half fortress, formerly the residence of the dispossessed Riarii. The duke was lodged in this abode, and an apartment was assigned in it by special favour to Messer Niccolò. Duly installed in his chambers, Machiavelli was busied in arranging his toilet for an audience, from a truly republican wardrobe, consisting only of one good suit to relieve that in which he travelled, when the tapestry behind a mirror, before which he was arranging his attire with a very studious and earnest look, was lifted, and the duke himself entered.

“Ha, Niccolò! and so their magnificences can only afford you one suit of Genoa black?” said Cæsar, with his wonted vivacity, and glancing at the large open chest which betrayed even as much.

“Republies, signor, do not love to waste their gold in gilding—and mine own patrimony lies chiefly in vineyards, much ravaged of late by the Vitelli,” replied the secretary, with some confusion. “But most heartily do I rejoice to find your excellence in such health and cheerfulness.”

“Wherefore not, Niccolò!” replied Cæsar. “But continue thine apparelling, for in a few minutes, remember, thou art to have an audience of the Duke of Romagna—at present a gossip with thine old friend and scholar, Cæsar Borgia.”

“And as either, signor, it both grieves and satisfies me to be the bearer of my lords’ offer of shelter and receipt from your encompassing enemies,” replied Niccolò.

“Nay, do they deem me at such a pass?” replied Cæsar, with a cloud passing over his visage. “But the deeper the darkness the brighter shall be my emergence from it.—Yet am I well content to hear thine errand, for well I know the barons have implored ye to join in the alliance against the tyrant—is it not so?”

“With infinite supplications, signor, but as long as the Orsini and Vitelli are cousins of the Medici, in vain,” replied the secretary.

"But thou hast doubtless some heavy conditions to make to me for the favour and protection of thy lords?" said Cæsar, darting his keen and sarcastically smiling eye at the envoy.

"Nay, my lord, mine office and the will of their magnificences are fulfilled, if I can prevail upon you to accept their aid, and to deny submission to the power of your insolent rebels," returned Machiavelli.

"Why, truly, if we conclude a peace, I doubt not the restoration of the Medici will be among their dictations," said Cæsar, thoughtfully.

"Assuredly then your excellency can have no thought of any, since it were your final and utter ruin!" exclaimed the alarmed secretary.

"Why, doth not thine own errand tell thee I am desperate?" replied Cæsar, with a strange smile, in which lurked some occult meaning. "Let the republic be wise with the rest, and leave my broken fortunes to stagger down, even after the French fashion—for you see they send me not a spear from Milan."

"But, my lord, though our will be stronger to aid you than our power, there is your new and puissant ally of Ferrara fails you not at this deadly pinch," said the secretary.

"In truth, his ambassadors—and we hear great tidings of their magnificence—passed through the Bolognese yesterday," replied Cæsar, with a darkening brow. "But they come awooing not fighting, Niccolò; and some mischief-makers have persuaded them that as long as my garrisons exercise themselves on the frontiers of Ferrara it is as well to keep at home. True 'tis, they pretext the Venetians to his holiness—who admits the excuse. So let it be—awhile. Yet we thank them—they have done us more good than they intended. Signor Paolo bath at length deigned to hear our earnest supplications, and on my hostages reaching his camp will graciously visit Imola to command what I must do to be received back into the favour of himself and his fellow rebels."

"Then I beseech your excellency to give me some assurance that nought shall be stipulated to the prejudice of the republic," said Machiavelli.

"I would not men should gage my fears by my promises," returned Cæsar. "When I fear less, I will promise—when I do not fear at all, I will perform. And now, Niccolò, throw off the ambassador as I have doffed the duke, and tell me truly, what deemest thou of my present state?"

"Firstly and chiefly, I do marvel to see a prince of your lordship's wisdom in it," said Machiavelli, hastily.

"Even as men marvel to see a fox in a trap," said Cæsar, smiling.

"Again, signor, remembering our frequent discourses, it mazes me that you should have made no effort to raise an army of your own, but fatally continued to trust in auxiliaries and mercenaries," said the politician, somewhat timorously.

"Niccolò, Niccolò!—but I know that I can trust thee, for thou hast no manner of interest to betray me," said Cæsar. "And, therefore, I will tell thee—that but for the madness of the English knight, which hurried on my projects to too sudden and violent a catastrophe—little hath befallen me which I had not planned and desired;—for only the terror and wrath of so mighty a combination could have driven his holiness and her lovesickness (I speak of the old man and his daughter) to open their coffers, and suffer me to levy some such host as thou hast so oft advised, and they have ever denied. But, Niccolò, they dream not what an army I am se-

cretly gathering in my citadels — and did never a bird in Florence whisper in thy keen ear how I have bought all King Frederic's artillery—which the boasting French thought all too dear valued but by the weight? And thus thou seest that to protract my danger is my truest policy. I need nothing but time—and that this very powerlessness for which thou blankest me has won me. And though I but tap my wedges noiselessly, they are riving the confederacy in every direction. Thou wouldst smile to know how the Bentivogli delay an assault on me here, which I could not resist, because I talk of leaving them Bologna, and accepting their gold and troops instead; how the Orsini listen to my wondrous plans on Ferrara, to commence with a forced marriage at Rome; how the Vitelli are willing I should seize Sienna; and the Petrucci that Guidobaldo need not be restored."

Machiavelli himself could only gaze in wonder at his great pupil, or rather master.

"Then still, still in my Cæsar do I behold the destined deliverer of Italy, the expeller of the barbarians from her beautiful, though ravaged breast!" he exclaimed in a kind of prophetic furor.

"Yea, I will become so glorious that my faults—if I have any—shall show to men's wondering gaze no darker than the spots in yonder sun that sets blazing over the mountains and valleys of Italy, in which my name shall be eternal as that of the first Cæsar!" said the Borgia, kindling into a rapture of ambition not unusual with him. "But peace, peace; there is an earthquake between me and my visions, and ruins the boldest seers yet dream not! Meanwhile the Orsini have smoothed my first steps; no entreaties, even of Lucrezia, can soften the pontiff's wrath against them—for they have prated to raise an anti-pope in Italy in the person of his bitterest foe, the Cardinal ad Vincula, and Lucrezia knows how the Orsini hate her last love, the Prince of Ferrara."

"But when my lords shall hear that Paolo Orsino has been with your excellency, what can I say to comfort them?" said Machiavelli, dolefully.

"Niccolò, I know I may confide in thee as to mine own heart; but even that I would not trust if I could help it, lest some unguarded throbbing should betray me," replied Cæsar, musingly; and then rising with that smile of his, darker than any frown, he continued—"Tell your lords merely, that delay is my only hope, and that negotiations are tedious matters. And add, that I prick my ears on all sides—and *bide my time!*"

Thus ended the first conference of Messer Niccolò's remarkable embassy; and in consequence he beheld with the less alarm the arrival of the Lord Paolo on the following day. Moreover, the vigilant secretary noted a deadly paleness, and a glow in the young baron's eyes, when he left the presence of Cæsar, taking care to throw himself accidentally in his way to observe, which was a remarkable change from his firm and haughty manner on arriving.

Had the confederacy pushed on its successes with vigour, the Borgian grandeur was now undoubtedly on the brink of an abyss into which it might easily have been hurled. But the utter submission which he feigned, and the certainty of the danger of the position to which they had reduced him, made the barons imagine that they had really achieved all, and inclined them to listen to his entreaties to dictate their own terms. Subdued by the magic which Cæsar found in the passions of men, Paolo Orsino became his most efficient instrument; and when once the tie of a common

danger was slackened, the points of disunion were so numerous and so dexterously seized by Cæsar, that not only did he protract the negotiation, but gradually introduced so many distrusts and disputes among the allies, that it was against his own will and entreaties that Alexander's urgent demands procured him at length the reinforcement of a body of French troops, which, with his own levies, rendered him once more on a par with his assailants.

The consternation was again very great; but Cæsar betrayed no symptoms of departing from the terms which he had assented to in his evil plight, and even Vitellozzo began to believe in his sincerity when he renewed his proposals for a general peace. He even relinquished his design on Bologna, and consented to receive, instead of the submission of its lords, a large contingent of men and money. It is true that he would no longer listen to the stipulations of the confederates in favour of the Duke of Urbino; but to quiet their fears, he offered to dismiss the French aid, if they would promise to assist him in the recovery of that state. Paolo urged this article with infinite zeal, alleging its advantages in placing the person of the duke in the hands of the confederacy, and limiting the sphere of his mischievous activity. Finally, he procured, or rather Cæsar himself suggested, that to obviate mistrusts only one of the chiefs should be compelled to serve him in person, who should command the whole of their forces under him.

Paolo himself declared his readiness to be the first to accept this dangerous honour; and the advance of Cæsar with his French allies, and the desertion of several powerful barons from the league, so seconded his eloquence that the fatal compact was at last concluded. The unfortunate Duke of Urbino, finding resistance hopeless, between his approaching enemies and his false allies, fled once more to Venice, destroying the majority of his fortresses ere he departed, that they might not be again used in the oppression of his faithful vassals. He released his adherents from all obligations, only entreating and obtaining from Sir Reginald le Beaufort that he would take charge of the city of Sinigaglia until his sister, its sovereign, could effect her escape.

The Florentine secretary's satisfaction in the turn of affairs was of course very great; and he incessantly urged his favourite maxims on Cæsar, especially the expediency of utterly destroying the power of the barons, now that he had the means in his hands. Many emphatic assurances of assent did he receive; and in fact Cæsar's army, composed chiefly of the French auxiliaries, moved on as if to attack that of the barons, when suddenly, on arriving at Fano, the conclusion of a peace, and the dismissal of the French, were announced in a breath, to the astonishment of all, and of none more than of the French themselves.

Cæsar alleged the exhausted state of the country, and the impossibility of otherwise restoring the confidence of the barons; but it was reported, and was in some measure true, that the French retired in high dudgeon at the cavalier treatment they had received. On the contrary, the joy of the confederates was unbounded; and at Paolo's request, and as a mark of their confidence, they agreed to concentrate their army on Sinigaglia, and recover it for the duke, provided that he would not come among them in person. The lady of Sinigaglia had indeed effected her escape by Le Beaufort's exertions; and it was known that he retained the city only until the galleys, which Duke Guidobaldo had promised to send from Venice, could arrive to convey himself and his soldiery thither. But since the

escape of the Knight of St. John from San Leo, Paolo's resentment against Le Beaufort had become a species of frenzy, so that he readily consented to gratify the revengeful feeling which apparently induced Cæsar to desire the attack.

The barons stipulated that Cæsar should remain at Fano, a town about fifteen miles from Sinigaglia, on the same line of coast. Of the great chieftains who commanded the confederate army, the three Orsini, Vitellozzo, and Oliverotto da Fermo were the principal: and from the walls of Sinigaglia Le Beaufort beheld a numerous host, under their banners, emerge from the defiles of the mountains above it.

Le Beaufort was well aware of the inadequacy of his means of resistance, the city itself being weak, the inhabitants disaffected or panic-struck, and his soldiery scarcely sufficient to man the walls. Nevertheless he put on a good countenance, when Paolo Orsino appeared to summon the city, which he performed without the least sign of recognising his ancient friend, and with great insolence and contempt of manner. Irritated by this conduct, and well aware of the mistrusts between the barons and Cæsar, Le Beaufort replied with equal scorn, by declaring that, since he was called upon to surrender the city to the church, he would only yield its keys to her lieutenant in person, the Duke of Romagna.

“Farewell, then, governor of Sinigaglia, and when we meet again, one of us shall be on the brink of his eternal doom!” shouted Paolo; and it was a prophecy, though the prophet knew it not.

Preparations for an assault commenced, but the citizens now openly deserted the walls, and as his own force was quite inadequate to their defence, Le Beaufort resolved to retreat to the citadel, and make what terms he could. The citizens immediately negotiated with the besiegers, and towards evening their banners were seen waving on the walls, and their host swarming in the streets.

Two days of continual assaults, valiantly repulsed, taught the besiegers to respect the courage of their enemies, but the castle into which they had retreated was now enclosed on all sides, and Cæsar had sent some ordnance to the assistance of his allies, which began to tell upon the ancient walls. Having little motive to protract his defence longer than honour required, Le Beaufort now determined to propose the surrender of the citadel, on condition that he and his troops were allowed to retire unmolestedly to Venice.

The barons were in deep consultation when this message arrived, but on another subject, with which, nevertheless, Paolo Orsino immediately connected it.

“And this, signori, is the occasion which the duke bade me take to introduce his earnest suit for the conference,” he exclaimed. “Perchance he meditates some vengeance, not unjust, on this treacherous foreigner; or merely the delight to humble his pride prompts him to desire that he shall indeed be compelled to present the keys of Sinigaglia to the lieutenant of the church in person. But be that as it may, it were ungracious to refuse; and what can we fear, since he has dismissed the French, since the Florentines are full of fear and mistrust of him in our alliance, since we are to receive him in the midst of our own victorious legions?”

“Wherefore should Cæsar Borgia desire to put his person in our hands?” said Vitellozzo, suspiciously shaking his long grey beard.

“Nay, father Vitelli, let us not ask the wherefore, but seize the when,”

said Oliverotto da Fermo. "For my part, I say, let us get him among us, and then propose Tuscany, and if he refuses, cut his throat, and throw him to some dog to lick clean for his shroud."

"Peace, bull-dog, thou art enough to ruin the devices of Solomon," said Vitellozzo, glaring half-pleasedly at his ferocious lieutenant, and yet rebukingly. "But, no, Paolo, no; we conditioned that only one should dance in his nets at a time, and thou hast devoted thyself to the office."

"It is true, but, Vitelli, hast thou considered the danger to leave all your soldieries uncaptained, and exposed to the influence of his silvery tongue?" replied Paolo.

"His silvery tongue will sing in vain to my rough German ritters," said Oliverotto, laughing hoarsely.

"Ay, but what say you to his gold one? And the old Catalan, though he groans to waste his daughter's dowry, flings it out with both hands in his terror," replied Paolo. "Yet Cæsar foreseeing this objection, consents that we should quarter our Italian soldiery in the neighbouring towns and castles, and keep the camp only with our mercenaries."

"Methinks he hath not three hundred lances with him at Fano, and I keep the town with a thousand," said Oliverotto. "Surely his head is addled in some of these late thunderstorms, or by the panics we have given him."

"Christ's death! I will not enter any hole that is so smooth and open, with so relishing a smell of cheese at the bottom," said Vitellozzo, in a resolved tone. "For I misdoubt this goodly project he hath to propose, which is to remove all reason of jealousy or quarrel from among us for ever, is neither more nor less than some such savoury bait. No, by the cross of God! I will not venture within his clutch."

"Nay, then, Paolo, let us be plain with them," said the Duke of Gravina, impetuously. "Sirs, what is more dangerous to us than this alliance of the Borgias with Ferrara? What if some good saint hath put it into Cæsar's head that it would also cause his ruin, sithence the old man's dotage would henceforth seek to make the name of his daughter's children greatest in Italy. Who knows not that Urbino and Romagna kiss with Ferrara on the mountains? And what were easier, in the lull of these gorgeous bridalties, wherewith Alexander flaunts our house, were we of a mind with Cæsar, than to set him on a throne the which to keep may furnish him with amusement for the rest of his life, sever him for ever from the favour of France, and of the pontiff, and make him dependent wholly upon us for support. I say not that this is Cæsar's project, but I say—what if it were?"

With all his desire to carry his point, Paolo felt an ominous thrill in his heart when he heard his father thus repeat the ideas which he had laboriously infused into his mind. But he hastened to break the silence which followed.

"Nay, further, we shall have a hostage of Cæsar's sincerity which none can doubt," he exclaimed. "This betrothed lady must pass through the duke's towns of Romagna on her way; and Cæsar hath sworn that until with his own hand he gives her to me as the bride which his treacherous sire long promised her, he will not ask us to raise a lance in his name."

"Hark, how young Fabio sighs; even the children will not suck these poisoned sweetmeats," said Vitellozzo, but evidently staggered.

It was long, however, before the obstinate misgivings of the Vitelli could be vanquished; but such is the power of words sent glowing from

the mists of passion, that Paolo prevailed at length upon the barons to grant Cæsar the meeting he desired. Vitellozzo consented, with as gloomy a visage as if signing his own death-warrant; while, flushed with triumph, Paolo recalled Le Beaufort's messenger, and bade him inform his master that his enemies were unwilling he should perjure himself, and therefore requested him to have his keys in readiness to deliver to the Duke of Romagna on the following day.

“And add to the good knight,” said Vitellezzo gloomily, “that I receive him into my brotherhood, and will see all his conditions kept, an if God gives me grace to live so long.”

CHAPTER XLIX.

“We'll mock the time with fairest show;
Fair face must hide what the false heart does know.”—SHAKSPEARE.

Of all those who were astonished and alarmed at the conclusion of the peace and dismissal of the French, none was more so than the Florentine secretary. His fears were kept continually on the stir by the messages passing between the camps, and by mysterious movements of troops, which appeared and disappeared, whence and whither no man knew. After vainly sounding all indirect channels, a report that Cæsar was about to join the army of the confederates at Sinigaglia excited his worst fears; which were confirmed when, contrary to his custom, the duke refused him an audience until the following day, at dawn, immediately before his departure to Sinigaglia.

It may therefore be conjectured that the envoy was prompt to the hour named for his audience; and he was admitted to Cæsar's presence before the sun appeared, though the sky was lighted up. He was in a little cabinet, clad in a cuirass of so light and ductile a mail that it was not visible under the satin doublet which he subsequently assumed. Eight persons were in attendance, one of whom was Don Migueloto; and the rest were all captains high in his command, or principal officers of his household.

“Give you good day, Messer Niccolò di Bernardo Machiavelli,” said Cæsar, laughingly. “I doubt I have roused you before the fallow-deer, albeit they say the first glean in the glades startles them. Break your fast with me—here are figs, grapes, bread, and Falernian—mark you, a learned wine. But who hath forewarned you of a journey, that you are ready equipped for one?”

“Signor, if the person of your excellence is to be put into Orsini hands, the ambassador of Florence has no longer any office near it,” replied Machiavelli.

“Dost thou fear a muzzled bear, Niccolò?” said the duke, thoughtfully. “And Paolo Orsino, limber and strong as he is, will be little better between these two stout gentlemen of the Savelli name, dispossessed by his uncle, Virginio, of their fief on Tiber. The bull-calf, Vitellozzo, is unruly—but John of Augsburg and Philip the Swiss will hold him in a halter he shall not easily break. The Duke of Gravina is old, and therefore Monsignor d'Enna, though a priest, aided by my master of the household,

may contrive between them to keep him in order. Oliverotto—nay, Migueloto and Don Ugo, ye must call upon the flimsy ghost of his old butchiered uncle to help you lead him to his doom."

"But, signor, what may this avail, surrounded by their host—the remotest at scarce an hour's summons?" exclaimed the Florentine.

"Between life and death there is not an instant, Niccolò," replied the duke sombrely. "An hour!—'tis long enough for the destruction of the whole human race, had we but the means in our hands—as I have for theirs in mine. And whose maxims do I practise—crushing whom I have provoked; striking suddenly, and but one blow; rooting out, not lopping mine enemies—when I rid me, to-day and for ever, of the obstacles to my greatness, your republic of her deadliest foes, and deprive my haters in Rome of their sole balance against me—yea, compel them, in their own defence and preservation, to drink as deeply in the quaff of vengeance and blood?"

Messer Niccolò glanced with an expression of awe at his terrific pupil; but to a politician deeply imbued with the maxims of Italian state-craft, a patriot and a republican who keenly recollected the ravages which the Orsini and Vitelli had wrought in Tuscany, and their object to restore the splendid tyranny of the Medici, the treachery mingled in the draught but little marred the sweetness of its flavour. Moreover, Messer Niccolò felt that no hesitation would be permitted in him after such a confidence.

"The republic will indeed light bonfires in pyramids to hear such news, instead of the despondence I thought to be obliged to carry home, signor," he said. "I crave your excellency's permission to be of your retinue, that I may faithfully report tidings so musical in Florence. But, signor, far, far indeed, have you surpassed in contrivance him whom you deign to style your master, since even mine imagination cannot devise how you project to destroy these traitors, surrounded by their victorious and well-paid mercenaries."

"Come hither—to this window, where in my noonday rests I studied and digested all, gazing at the statue of Fortune in yonder fountain, and the triumphal arch of Augustus Cæsar beyond it. But fall what may," continued the Borgia, his eyes scintillating with the fervour of the passions stirred within his soul; "fall what may, I must on, and cannot and will not back, though I should find the Metauro rolling with flames instead of water. I tell thee, all is won or lost to-day: and I will not forfeit my hopes in it for a saint's diadem in bliss. But toss down a goblet and finish your grapes, for we must to horse ere the sun looks too revealingly down upon our enterprise."

The matters debated between Cæsar and the Florentine secretary need not be detailed, as they were put so soon in action; but the day was still in its serene and beautiful dawn when the Duke of Romagna, attended by Messer Niccolò, the fatal eight, and a slender guard of cavalry, rode out of Fano.

One of his apprehensions vanished from Messer Niccolò's mind when, reaching the banks of the Metauro, he beheld Cæsar's army drawn up in array. His surprise at its great number betrayed itself in his eager question to the duke by what magic he had procured them, when no man suspected him to possess one-third the force, and of those the greater part were blocked up in fortresses.

"The fortresses can look to themselves, since we are between them and any assailant," replied Cæsar. "They were to me what the clefts and

hollows of the mountains are to the torrent, when it prepares its strength secretly in snow and ice; only I calculated to the instant the general thaw and flow, which the unreasoning warmth doth blindly with its streams."

The passage of the river was immediately commenced, the infantry crossing by a bridge, the cavalry by a ford; and Machiavelli, keeping near the duke, continued to show his calmness by relating that it was in this very river, now so clear and full of trout, that Asdrubal the brother of Hannibal was overthrown and perished.

"I would it still ran dark red with the African blood!" said Cæsar, suddenly and fiercely interrupting Machiavelli's historical reminiscences. "This tranquillity is at discord with my soul—but I shall be merrier anon, for the way hence to Sinigaglia is very gloomy and sad."

And so it proved; the remaining ten miles of the road to the fated city stretched along the sea-shore—barren and melancholy sands hemmed in by the bases of mountains scantily decorated with herbage, and stunted forests whose wild arms stretched all in one direction from the sea, as if imploring aid from its violence. Sometimes these hills receded into dreary downs covered with black sea-weed, shells, and all the litter of ocean; at others, advanced so far that the road winding at their bases was washed by the waves. The incessant roar of the sea, though then in one of its calmer moods, harmonized not ill with dark meditations, but it had a singular effect in enlivening those of Cæsar. His gaiety bordered on wildness: he galloped frequently into the frothy waters as if to enjoy their turbulence and confused rush around him: and when his horse stooped to drink at the wave, and started back from its bitterness, he laughed aloud, and declared that henceforth he would call him Orso.

It had been agreed that the barons were to resign the city of Sinigaglia to Cæsar and his escort, quartering the principal mass of their own troops in the villages beyond. But to secure themselves against all danger, Oliverotto da Fermo occupied a suburb towards Fano, called Il Borgo, which was separated from the walls of the city by a river. This was crossed by a narrow bridge nearly opposite the town-gates: and a squadron of Cæsar's men-at-arms, duly instructed, who headed his advance, on reaching this bridge, as if to enter the city, made a sudden halt, wheeled, and opened their ranks.

Learning from this circumstance the approach of their visitor, the barons prepared to mount, and ride forth and welcome him. Paolo's gaiety was remarkable, and he was arrayed in very gorgeous armour, with a white plume mingling once more with his own flame-tints. But the qualms of Vitellozzo had returned, and he was dressed with strange carelessness, without armour, and with a cap of green velvet set on his head in a dejected droop very contrary to the hopefulness the colour was meant to indicate. And now when he observed the masses of spearmen hastening over the bridge into Sinigaglia, whose visages and accoutrements were all strange to him, he turned restive again, and firmly refused to advance unless Oliverotto remained in the Borgo, and assembled his German lances to guard against any treachery. In vain did Paolo labour, even against the strange thoughts which arose in his own mind, to persuade him that the peaceful passage of so great a host showed plainly that no evil could be projected. Vitellozzo was obstinate, and Oliverotto, who was his pupil and strongly attached to him, took his old commander's side; so that finally it was agreed to leave the Lord of Fermo at his post.

Attended by a small troop of horsemen, the Duke of Gravina, Vitellozzo, and Paolo rode forth; but when they had passed the river, and the approach of the duke was visible, the burly chieftain trembled as if in an ague, and turned lividly pale. Paolo, who was watching him uneasily, said with a smile, “ You are chilly out of armour, Vitellozzo; for though I have seen you in some bloody fields, I never saw you tremble in that.”

“ I feel even now at heart as my brother of thy name, Paolo, told me he felt that day we returned to Florence, and the ungrateful butchers slaughtered him,” said Vitellozzo, almost inarticulately. “ And yet—would to all saints, that instead of to meet this man, I were about to face the whole city of Florence, with their sharp-nailed women into the bargain.”

“ ‘Tis a vain augury, Vitellozzo; for thou knowest I am something of a swallow, melancholy mood, and yet to-day I feel as if my body had wings, and my steed and I were dancing in the air,” said Paolo, making his horse indeed give an airy vault.

At that very instant Cæsar had discerned their approach, and turning to Machiavelli, he said, “ Now, look if thou canst discern any tint of the eternal darkness on these men’s faces that stand on the brink of it, for, by heaven, thine has caught the dull leaden colour of the ocean we have coasted !”

Machiavelli smiled and roused himself, but his heart beat thickly in his bosom. The chieftains, however, approached, and Cæsar, waving his hand delightedly, spurred forward to meet them. “ I am happy once again!—my paladins are restored to me!” he exclaimed, embracing Paolo, who was the foremost, in his arms, and saluting the two older warriors with more respect but extreme cordiality. “ Illustrious Gravina! whom I may well call my father since he is Paolo’s.—Vitellozzo!—Oh, I have missed thy towering form from my line of war.—But where is my valiant ‘Liverotto’?”

“ Signor, he is busied drawing up our little retinue to welcome you,” replied Vitellozzo, eagerly.

“ Why—that is well,” returned the duke, and his eye fell upon Don Migueloto with an expression which the castellan understood as well as any words: and while Cæsar renewed his greetings to the barons he glided quietly forward.

Cæsar protracted his inquiries and compliments until he imagined that the castellan had time to execute his purpose, and then, affecting much weariness, he requested his hosts, as he called them, to lead him to his lodgings in Sinigaglia.

Meanwhile Migueloto rode into the open square of the Borgo, in which he found Oliverotto forming his troops in array.

“ Signor,” he said, after a brief salute, “ I am sent to desire you to return your soldiers into their lodgments, for the duke fears lest his men, finding them unoccupied, should seize them, whence may arise some sudden and dangerous tumult, for ours are raw and unaccustomed fellows. Wherefore, I pray you, order the Germans into their quarters, and follow me to the duke’s presence, who swears he misses you more than he rejoices in all he has found.”

This flattering bait, and the tranquillity with which everything proceeded, won the Lord of Fermo into immediate compliance. The Germans, alarmed at the peril which their lodgings ran, eagerly obeyed his dismissal; and Oliverotto blithely spurred on to meet the duke. Don Ugo de Cordova rode up to him with renewed salutations as he approached, and

between him and the castellan the Lord of Fermo continued his advance.

Cæsar was soon visible, complacently riding abreast with Paolo, and laughingly telling him that the two Savelli, who rode beside him, hoped by their courtesy to win the restoration of their little fief on Tiber—at which they also smiled, though gloomy men. The Duke of Gravina followed, in condescending discourse with Monsignor d'Enna and the major-domo; and after them came Vitellozzo, between two stout Swiss captains, who attentively watched him from under their fierce bushy eyebrows. But the Lord of Castello scarcely noticed them, absorbed in a resolution which he had formed of inventing some excuse to remain out of Sinigaglia, as soon as he arrived among Oliverotto's troops.

The increase of Vitellozzo's alarm may be imagined when he saw the Borgo completely deserted, and beheld Oliverotto dismounting to receive the duke.

“Ah, thou art fairly out of thy mourning weeds?” said Cæsar, smiling at the chieftain's gay attire.

“Signor, this is but an old suit—ay, indeed, 'tis that in which I sat at the banquet when the tumult rose in which my uncle was unfortunately slain!—but 'tis a year agone,” replied Oliverotto, somewhat confusedly.

“I am glad of it—very glad—glad you have a friend to plead for you in paradise, for I have heard he was a good old man,” said Cæsar, with singular emphasis. “But now lead the way; ye shall *all* feast with me to-night.”

“I crave your grace to pardon me; I have a strange chill in my blood, for 'tis months since I stirred without armour,” said Vitellozzo.

“At least you must all accompany me to my lodgment, for men's eyes are upon us,” said Cæsar. “Moreover, I would consult ye what to do with the daring boy who tore San Leo from me, and forsooth will yield the keys of Sinigaglia to none but me.” And he spurred on, seeming scarcely to hear what Vitellozzo said, until he had brought up the rear of that doomed procession which passed under the gate of Sinigaglia.

“My word is plighted in yours, Vitellozzo—why, it is very true; and as ye keep it, so will I,” said Cæsar. “But is the fall he gave you in the Colosseum so all-forgotten, then?”

“Your grace must forgive him a heavier offence, an you let him go free and unscathed, as he demands,” said Paolo, passionately.

“Nay—heavier?—Vitellozzo is good weight,” replied the duke, laughingly. “But 'tis well minded—where is young Fabio?”

“We cannot wean him from his books—but I warrant me he is feigning to observe the German discipline with Oliverotto's bands,” said the Duke of Gravina, testily. “The monks made a fool of me to let him learn his letters; but if I have a hundred grandchildren, not one of them shall know more Latin than will draw his sword.”

“My sister is learned: she will not let you have your way, signor,” said Cæsar, with a subtle smile. “But concerning this Englishman;—what says our valiant and experienced Oliverotto?”

“Keep as much faith with him, my lord, as will hang him from yonder tower!” replied the Lord of Fermo, pointing to the castle whose battlements towered above the palace which Cæsar was to occupy.

“In very troth, signor, his treason to my son deserves no better,” said the Duke of Gravina.

“Treason for treason! fie, what moral were that?” said Cæsar, gravely. “But yonder black pile is to be my lodging—yea, by the standard

waving—out of a chimney, is it? Why, then, since ye all seem weary too, we will but pledge the continuance of this dear love and confidence in the same bowl, and then separate until the morrow."

"Signor, I pray you—I do fear some quarrel among the soldiery," said Vitellozzo, although the community of drink suggested removed any fear of poison.

"I hold myself but as your guest in Sinigaglia," said Cæsar, somewhat imperiously. "And if ye will not welcome me to my lodging, I will escort you back to yours, that gazers may not report we parted coldly."

Vitellozzo glanced back, and beheld the solid mass of spears which intervened between himself and the Borgo; and with a deep sigh he joined the rest, who had dismounted to escort Cæsar to his apartment. Entering the hall, he paused dejectedly for an instant on the threshold, and his eye fell on the Florentine envoy.

"Ser Niccolò," he said, eagerly pressing towards the secretary, who followed Cæsar, "it joys me to meet you here. I pray you sup with us to-night, and we will hope to clear all clouds of our intentions from your mind."

"Signor!—now heaven forbid that I shoud sup with you to-night!" repeated the envoy, startled with his own thought mingling in the invitation, which was uttered with solemnity in the speaker's earnestness, and more like a summons than an invitation. As he spoke they entered a large, gloomy chamber, with grated windows, hug with tapestry, in which were wrought unnumbered elephants and roses, the armorial bearings of the Malatesta family, to whom the palace formerly belonged. Vitellozzo was somewhat comforted to find that the only person in the chamber was the negro, Zeid; and yet his large white eyes gazing upon them as they entered were instinct with a strange expression of bloodthirsty eagerness.

"Wine, wine!" exclaimed Cæsar, and the negro darted forward with a golden goblet and a large crystal jug, which he presented kneeling to the duke.

"How chances it thou art my cupbearer?" said Cæsar, filling the goblet to the brim, and glancing round the group which had collected in a respectful circle about him. "We are to be one another's tasters," he continued, and his ready instruments looked at him like hounds in the leash. At this moment he noticed that Vitellozzo started, and following the direction of his eye, saw that it rested on the point of a steel boot projecting from beneath the tapestry. There was no time to be lost, and raising the goblet, Cæsar exclaimed "Perdition to all traitors!" and tossed it high in the air. Simultaneously each of the chieftains found his arms clutched on both sides, and as the goblet fell, the tapestry was torn down by a rush of armed men from behind, who, before a single word was spoken, surrounded the group with levelled spears.

"Ay, perdition to all traitors! and where are any blacker than ye?" shouted Cæsar, laughing with frantic exultation at his amazed and terror-stricken guests. "Ursine bears, old and young! bull of Castello! wolf of Fermo! I have trapped ye all."

"Did I not tell thee, Paolo?" said Vitellozzo, with the calm of utter despair.

"But it cannot be! it is impossible! Cæsar can execute none of his projects without our aid!" said Paolo, staring incredulously at the two Savelli, who now with unrestrained ferocity flourished their daggers in his face.

"Then were Cæsar ever your slave; but to do without ye, alas! I must begin, and that very briefly," said Cæsar, with ironical fierceness. "Nay, look not back, Vitellozzo—only your executioner is there."

"My lord, of your inercy I pray you to consider that all I have done against you was in gratitude for many signal favours from Vitellozzo," said Oliverotto, staring aghast from his master to his capturer.

"Villain! and what gratitude didst thou show to thine aged uncle, when thou disdt brain him at the feast he made in thine honour?" said Cæsar, "Lo, now, thou hast not well worn the shoes in which thou trampledst his grey hairs, and thou shalt die in them! Lead them to prayers, until I have taken order with the rebellious slaves who abet them."

"Yet hear me—but one word, Cæsar Borgia!" exclaimed Paolo desperately. "Nay, thou shalt hear me. Condemn me to what shameful death thou wilt, but spare my father and my young brother, whom my madness has brought to this dread pass! Spare them, and I will plead thy pardon at the bar before which thy treachery sends me!"

"It were wise policy, indeed, to lop the branches and leave the trunk," returned Cæsar, scornfully. "There is not one of you, old or young, but is a foul traitor, oppressor, ravager, and murderer, and that shall not die the death of one!"

"May, then, my curse overtake thee at thy loftiest pinnacle of hope and power, and sit heavier on thee than thy brother's blood, and damn thee below Cain, thy prototype!" yelled the infuriate Orsino, making a wild effort to spring at his betrayer; but the Savelli locked him too firmly in their arms.

"I have slept calmly under a mountain of Colonna curses, and deem not the Orsini's ascend nearer Heaven," replied Cæsar, laughing. "Away with them!"

"But one prayer let me make which concerns my soul, not body," said Vitellozzo, strangely subdued, and yielding to the superstition which was perhaps at the root even of his rebellious audacity. "His holiness has been pleased to excommunicate me. Promise me, Cæsar, to obtain my pardon and remission, at least in that other world."

"By'r Lady, I doubt if he will forgive thee even there!—'twas thou who prated to strip him of his robe and burn him, on a plea which leaves thee little hope of Madonna Lucrezia's intercession," replied Cæsar repeating his absolute "Away with them!"

Each of the betrayed and doomed men was sternly commanded by his capturers to walk; and Paolo mechanically advanced a few steps, and then looked back at his father with a heart-rending expression. The aged duke had been as if petrified with amazement during the scene, but the glance restored him to consciousness and to his natural pride and fierceness.

"Hellish Borgia! priest's bastard! dost thou dare to dream to shed the blood of the Orsini and Vitelli?" he shouted, trembling with rage and infirmity rather than with fear. "Remember, villain and base-born traitor, that for every drop in my veins there lives an avenger, who will pour the last of his own' ere he sits down to smile on the recollection of this treason unmatched since Rome was Roman!"

"Old man, you threaten well; I must have Fabio, too," said Cæsar, calmly. "But to content ye, I will shed no drop of any of your most noble and most lawful blood; for I will strangle ye all like the common thieves, marauders, and pillagers which ye are, and have been during all the ages ye vaunt yourselves to have been nobles and princes of Italy!"

The raging exclamations of the old duke, the abject beseechings of

Oliverotto, were soon hurried out of hearing ; but the terrific silence and glance of Paolo Orsino at his betrayer, as he left the chamber with his guard, long haunted Messer Niccolò's meditations.

"This is the revenge which I promised thee in Imola I would take on the enemies of the signory, master secretary," said Cæsar, again laughing in the frantic excess of his triumph. "I have others of mine own in Rome, who will quake to hear of it, and whose dance commences to the music of these villains' dying groans. But now, if thou hast courage to see thy theories in practice, come with me, and behold the destruction of the barbarians in the Borgo."

While these events were enacted in the city of Sinigaglia, Le Beaufort was making preparations to evacuate the citadel, stung to the heart by the reply brought to his offer of surrender ; for he had hoped that his repentance and exertions in the cause of the confederacy might have mollified his former friend. But finding that it was impossible for him to resist or escape, he was compelled to abide by his own stipulation, with a great increase of anguish at the thought of his humiliation before his insolent enemy, the Duke of Romagna ; and, but for Vitellozzo's assurance, not without much doubt of his safety.

From the sunmit of his tower he witnessed the entry of Cæsar with the barons, and when they were fairly housed he retired to continue his preparations for the evacuation, which he supposed would be immediately demanded. Accordingly, it was not noticed that Cæsar suddenly re-appeared from the palace, mounted his horse, and rode out with all his cavalry into the Borgo, which was now hemmed in by his troops in the rear. The German ritters, separated from each other, and intent only on keeping their quarters, were easily overpowered, and a bloody massacre commenced. Meanwhile the army in Sinigaglia was to advance with Don Migueloto to the attack of the remoter cantonments of the barons. But fortunately for them, the soldiers in Sinigaglia imagined that they had a right to share the plunder enjoyed by their comrades in the suburb, and began to sack the city.

The uproar below brought Le Beaufort again to his battlements, and he conjectured that some tumult had arisen between the citizens and their conquerors. This notion was confirmed when at length Cæsar reappeared in the confusion, and in his fury was observed to slay several of the marauders with his own hand. But night darkened over the city ere the tumult seemed altogether appeased ; and then Le Beaufort received intimation by a herald that the lieutenant of the church awaited to receive the keys of Sinigaglia from his hand.

Disdaining to use a golden ewer which the Lady of Sinigaglia had given him, and which Bampton advised him to take for the purpose, Sir Reginald put the keys in his helmet, and rode out of the castle attended only by a single archer. He left Bampton with instructions not to surrender the citadel until he returned in person to give the order ; for although the old man rejoiced infinitely in the conclusion which his master's Italian warfare must now reach, Sir Reginald knew that his firmness and fidelity were not to be shaken.

Le Beaufort expected to be led into some "feasting presence" of his enemies, and to run the gauntlet of their mockery. It was therefore with great and visible surprise that he found himself ushered into the presence of Cæsar, alone in the devastated chamber which was the scene of the surprisal, and restlessly pacing up and down.

And his reception by Cæsar was very different from what he had anticipated. "Welcome, Orlando! welcome, Sir Launcelot! or rather, welcome all the paladins and Knights of the Round Table in one," he exclaimed, seizing Le Beaufort's gauntleted hands in his own.

"Signor, I am none of these, but the captain of Sinigaglia, who brings you her keys as lieutenant of the church, whose arms I may no longer resist," replied the young knight, coldly, and presenting the helmet with few marks of the respect and ceremonial to be expected from the vanquished.

"Ay!—but he, too, must learn manners in my school," said Cæsar aloud, but as if speaking to himself, and continuing with a smile—"My jest still smarts in thy recollection. And in truth we should not scratch when we tickle. But I have learned to value thee better, even in the harms which thou hast done me: and if thou wilt become my captain thou shalt hang the keys of a nobler town than these paltry fishing-huts at thy girdle to-night."

"Henceforth, my lord, I think to serve no master under the majesty of a king," returned Le Beaufort, haughtily.

"Even there is the kernel of my thought.—Thou shalt serve one greater than that name—an emperor!—a Roman emperor!" replied Cæsar, with a flashing glance at the surprised warrior. "An emperor that must be made one by swords as tried and ready as thine—and who, as he owes all, will pay all, to their wielders."

"A Roman emperor!—are Maximilian and the German Ghibellines summoned by the Guelfs to Italy?" said Sir Reginald, now much amazed.

"Canst thou rave this, and look upon mine axe, which is thus toothed with hacking out the thick brains of Oliverotto's Rhenish robbers?" returned Cæsar, raising a weapon on which he was leaning, the broad edge of which was indeed covered with disgusting clots of blood and yellow pulp.

"Methought I beheld some plunderers at work, whom you rightfully suppressed—but what emperor can this be, unless the King of the Romans comes to Rome to claim the imperial crown?" said the knight, a dim suspicion darting into his mind.

"Nay!—but thou wilt believe in no emperor but one with a crown on his head, northman," replied Cæsar, somewhat contemptuously. "Yet must I be plain with thee. The plunderers whom I slew were of mine own host—but for whose mutiny not a Ghibelline of Oliverotto's Germans had escaped the doom which the majority have suffered. But, as thou sayest, the crown is in Rome, and thither an emperor goes to claim it, whose name is—and whose deeds perchance may be—an echo of the first Cæsar's."

After a pause of utter astonishment, and indeed somewhat of awe at the grandeur of the ambition thus revealed, Sir Reginald replied with evident incredulity—"Your highness jests with my dull northern wit again. Albeit his holiness dearly cherishes your person, what pope will endure an emperor in Rome?"

"But what if the question be reversed—what emperor will endure a pope in Rome?" replied Cæsar, calmly. "And so methinks it may be when with my potent and victorious and Italian legions I enter Rome, which I purpose within this calend."

"To dethrone our holy father in Rome!—which the accursed Turk and paynim would scarcely dream!" exclaimed Le Beaufort.

"Thou superstitious tramontane!—But, in truth, my holy father, and Lucrezia's holy father—and thine, yes, thine, if thou wilt and darest!" said Cæsar, vehemently. "But I speak not to dethrone—but to resume the imperial seat, which priests have so long usurped, and standing, they may recover their ancient humility and holiness, of which they have for ages retained only the title. What sayest thou? In what is Alexander so dear and sacred to thee that thou shouldst fear to follow in aught I may project against his sway?"

"But what say the Orsini, and the Vitelli, and the rest of your highness's new allies? Do they prefer the strong dominion of a soldier to the faint mastery of a priest?" said the still more astonished knight.

"I trust to secure at least their silent acquiescence," returned Cæsar, with a slight laugh. "Or hast thou forgotten that Paolo Orsino loves Lucrezia Borgia (who is so soon to be Lucrezia of Este), and would give back the universe to chaos to preserve her from the arms of her loved Alfonso?"

"And has your highness consented to—to what?" exclaimed Le Beaufort, turning very pale, a circumstance attentively noted by the Borgia.

"I have sworn to him, and must either keep my word or destroy its claimant, to cause Lucrezia to be detained on the bridal progress, which she has already commenced, on her passage through Romagna, and to confer her upon him as the price and security of his assistance in my enterprise," said Cæsar.

"Then, Duke Cæsar, by all that is sacred, if aught be deemed so by the Italians, I will not aid, but will rather battle to the death against you and him, and all your felon powers!" exclaimed the knight.

"Thou talkest dangerously for thyself," replied Cæsar, but quite placidly, and even contentedly. "Knowest thou not thou art in my power, knight, and that I have trusted thee too far, unless thou art wholly mine?"

"The Vitelli and Orsini, and even the ruffian of Fermo, have promised the observation of my terms," said Sir Reginald, not without alarm at this insinuation.

"But I have not," said Cæsar, demurely. "And for the Vitelli, they are out of the way to render thee any aid; and the Orsini and Oliverotto are eager for me to violate the compact with thy destruction."

"Recreant and disloyal nobles! Give me at least vengeance in death, signor, by suffering my challenge to meet them all at once, and let them take my life with their own hands!" said Le Beaufort, furiously.

"Thou shalt have vengeance even as thou ragest, but two of them will soon be beyond thy reach, and let us hope in a better place than this earth of ours," said Cæsar, gaily. "Yet, hark, that sounds not like the prayer of a Christian soul departing!"

A yell was suddenly heard in an adjoining apartment—a trample, and rapid struggle, or rather flutter, and then there was deep silence.

"The parricide of Fermo is gone to face his ancient uncle," continued the duke, calmly. "There is justice as well as policy in my doings; and now one mutters a distracted paternoster! Is that voice unknown to thee?"

"Vitellozzo's!" exclaimed Sir Reginald.

"Hush, or he may think it is the fiend calling him, being an excommunicated wretch!" said Cæsar.

There was another direful pause, and then a door was opened slightly

ajar, and the unsightly head of a negro projected, which gave a significant nod to the duke, and was instantly withdrawn.

"Peace to their traitorous souls, I grudge not that," said Cæsar, jeeringly. "Murderers and oppressors, who says they are not well gone, or that treachery can be against wolves and tigers?"

Perhaps for the first time in his life the courage of Le Beaufort gave way; his hair bristled, and his knees knocked together, as he said, "What is within there, my lord? It cannot be that the Vitelli is slain!"

"Come, then, and believe in thine own eyes," said Cæsar, snatching a lamp from the table, and leading the way with rapid strides to the door at which the negro had appeared. It opened into a narrow courtyard, surrounded by lofty buildings, in which were several soldiers and the negro, busily engaged, while Migueloto held a lamp, in stripping the bulky carcass of a man. The light falling on the ghastly and distorted visage, revealed the features of Vitellozzo, and the means of his death in the handkerchief knotted in a peculiar manner round his neck. At a little distance lay another corpse, which was partially thrust into a sack, but enough was visible to show that it was all that remained of the Lord of Fermo.

"Signor! the Lord Paolo, is he too dead?" gasped Le Beaufort.

"I but reserve him and his sire until I receive certain news of the seizure of the whole brood in Rome, and capture of Fabio Orsino, who most lucklessly was dreaming in a wood over his Petrarcha, for he left the book behind him in his flight," said Cæsar, gloomily. "But when the cardinal and the rest are captured, I will necessitate their doom by slaying these in my hands, for I love them no more than thou, and have as little cause. Or if thou misdoubt that I still keep terms with Lucrezia's would-be bridegroom, come with me."

He led the way across the court to a tower which was based in it, and ascended by a flight of narrow stairs to a chamber, barred within, and guarded without. He knocked, the door was opened by the two Sivelli, and followed all dreamily and mechanically by Le Beaufort, he entered.

The first object the latter discerned was Paolo Orsino, seated in chains, gazing vacantly at a lamp which was placed on the floor for lack of any other stand, and which cast dark upward shadows on his pallid visage.

"Is it the executioner?" he said, without looking round.

"It should be; but it is the captain of Simigaglia, with his keys," replied Cæsar, merrily; and staring round, Paolo perceived his former friend. "Thou didst desire his destruction at mine hand; now wouldst thou he should share thine own, or change fates with thee, which, as I live, I have resolved."

"What fate shall he change with me?" exclaimed the Orsino, with a strangely wild eagerness, the last clutch of hope.

"Thou seest, Reginald, how willingly he yields thee up to doom," said Cæsar. "But I speak not of the fate which thy fellow-traitors have but now undergone, and thou mightst have heard the big Vitello's struggle—but of that which thou didst project for thyself in Faenza, revelling in the unmatched beaties of Lucrezia, regardless of her hatred and assured resistance, which with this fair knight is not so much to be feared."

"Ha, traitor, ha! wild beast of humanity!" shouted the prisoner, furiously. "I care not for thy fiendish eyes, and will tell thee, Englishman, that he lures thee to destruction with the bribe that brought me hither, promising that at Faenza—oh fool, oh idiot without a fool's sense!—at

Faenza he would intercept Lucrezia on her way to Ferrara, and make her—oh, beast, beast—but *not* Alfonso's bride!"

"And where shall I find a bolder heart to execute such an enterprise than beats in Sir Reginald's breast?" replied Cæsar, sedately. "And being the renowned soldier that he is, potently allied in his native land, whence I can draw the valiant swords I need; no brother of the mighty rebels, Este or Orsino, not altogether unloved by Lucrezia;—I speak now a thought which hath long worked in my heart,—of all the suitors whom Lucrezia hath or had he were the least dangerous, and most acceptable to me. And by the light of heaven!—nay, I will swear by nought but the power I will put into his hands, if he dare undertake the office, from this instant he is my captain in Faenza."

"Speak, Sir Reginald, thou canst not refuse so fair a bait," said Paolo, laughing hoarsely.

"Nay, Sir Reginald, for thou shalt learn that I have as much need of thee as thou canst have of me in it," said Cæsar, with a look of devouring hate at his shackled victim. "Lucrezia must not to Ferrara, and yet, until I am master in Rome I dare not avow that my decree detains her at Faenza. Thy love for her is known, Le Beaufort, and 'tis by many thought, even by thy haughty rival, that she stands not ill-affected towards thee. Wherefore in Rome I can plead an insolent mutiny on thy part, and to the world, and to Alfonso of Ferrara, matters which shall balk his longings even for so fair a bride. Thy valour, and some wrong I have done thee, pleads my excuse to make thee now mine officer in so great a trust as that strongest city of my dominion; and strange it will be, if, with the gloss of thy renown upon thee, melting memories of the past, and all her bride's longings baffled and glowing in blood so warm—ay, strange it will be if thou canst not win her to admit a suit which I will also urge, or perchance, when I have gained full mastery, compel."

"Listen to the syren but an instant, and thou art lost," said Paolo, and yet gazing with something of jealous rage and doubt from the tempter to Le Beaufort. "Let me perish without even that sole hope which yet remained to me, that in thy remorse I should find an avenger, for thou hast brought me hither!—I could have borne aught but to see her in his arms! Hadst thou but hinted the truth of the Ferrarese I could have early taught my soul despair, shunned all the Borgian pitfalls, and known them for such! What had I done to thee that thou shouldst shed thy friend's blood, and guard thy rival and enemy from every harm?"

Deeply affected as he was with this appeal, Sir Reginald felt the necessity of counterfeiting a very different emotion, and he exclaimed, with seemingly bewildered eagerness of joy, "Let the losing gamester rave! but could I believe such happiness no dream, Cæsar, I were indeed your bondslave for ever!"

"Then is he lost, for he knows not how to feign!" groaned the Orsino.

"Yet didst thou call me traitor when I yielded to what was then a vague and air-built hope, Orsino!" returned Le Beaufort, with a glance so full of some unuttered meaning that Paolo started and looked at him stedfastly. "And now, when the sunshine hardens into diamond, wouldst thou have me hold back my hand from the prize?"

"Thou art captain of Faenza even now; and its prince that day which crowns me emperor in Rome," said Cæsar, unnoticed this mute dialogue in his exultation.

"And wilt thou become, then, this monstrous, unknightly villain and ravisher?" said the Orsino, in a low, but yet staggered tone.

"Wouldst thou not have been all, and more, for she never but loathed thy love?" returned Le Beaufort, and Cæsar laughed aloud.

"Fairly answered! let us leave him now to crack the nuts of his recollections," said Cæsar. "We have no time to lose, for my advance on Rome will hasten her journey from it."

"Betide what will, Orsino, *vengeance at least is mine!*" said Sir Reginald, with another glance, which the Orsino seemed to understand, for a momentary joy lightened over his face, which he concealed from Cæsar by turning away as if in despair. "Vengeance! and let the remembrance of the oath with which I swear it, comfort—as it may—thy doom."

"Why, then, since thou goest to destruction, too, let us part as brothers in calamity," said the Orsino, stretching his chained arms as if in mockery of the supposed threat; but Le Beaufort, observing Cæsar's look, turned haughtily away, and raising the cross of his sword to his lips, kissed it in ratification of his secret oath, and said aloud, "In faith I have too lately escaped the bear's hug, to trust me again in it. My lord, lead on, for henceforth the business of my life is to fulfil the vengeance which I swear on the whole generation of the betrayers!"

In the intoxication of his triumph over the most sagacious politicians of Italy, and his knowledge of the mighty passion whose influence on Le Beaufort he had essayed, Cæsar could not doubt the success of his artifices with the young barbarian. Yet he spent nearly the whole of the subsequent night in raising the most splendid visions of ambition and love in Sir Reginald's imagination, and in communications, in part real, of the vasty project he had formed. He assured Le Beaufort, with seeming earnestness, that as, in his intentions to seize on the supreme and undivided power in Rome, one of the greatest obstacles would be the pontiff's alliance with the potent house of Este, to prevent it was so great an object, that he should esteem Sir Reginald's success in his love-making the strongest augury of his own. Every facility should be afforded to him, and he stimulated the most vehement passions of the young knight by representing the many triumphs which converged into that delicious one of love, when after having vanquished his haughty rival in generosity and arms, he should also win his bride from him, even with her own consent. Lucrezia, he said, had probably already discovered that she had mistaken the awe and pique which the Hospitaller's insolent conduct had excited in her, for a passion which the more congenial nature of Sir Reginald was far more likely to kindle, and of which opportunity might enable him to convince her. Meanwhile, Cæsar must certainly be recalled to Rome by the disorders which would follow the tidings of the destruction of the rebels; and once in possession of the city, and of the vast treasures accumulated by the pontiff, he would have it in his power to accept the brother-in-law of his own and Lucrezia's choice.

When at length the crafty duke suffered Le Beaufort to retire, it was in the belief that he had dissipated every scruple in his breast, and converted him into an implicit and most necessary engine in his desperate policy.

CHAPTER L.

"Was not this love indeed? — Twelfth Night."

The following day beheld Le Beaufort on his way to Faenza, accompanied by his own archers, but also by Peter of Oviedo, and the crafty Bishop of Enna, with a large body of men-at-arms devoted to the duke. These and the garrison of Faenza formed a powerful array, quite sufficient to secure the destined prey; but Le Beaufort was not to be installed in his captaincy until Lucrezia arrived and it was time for the plot to explode.

And thus Cæsar trusted but little to his new adherent's fidelity, although he gave him credit for no faculty of dissimulation; for it was apparently impossible for him to escape, or avoid executing the task imposed upon him. And in truth, when he arrived in Faenza, and found himself lodged in the keep of the ancient castle or palace of the Manfredi, under the vigilant surveillance of Monsignor d'Enna, and surrounded by the troops of Peter of Oviedo, he felt himself no less a prisoner than if he had been in chains. And yet he dared not even venture to explain his situation to Bampton, whose despair and indignation at the change in his lord's resolutions, and the new service he had taken, knew no bounds. But when Le Beaufort declared the fixedness of his determination, and bade the old man, if he pleased, return to England without him, his grief and wrath worked silently, and he followed Le Beaufort in a sullen submission, which yet restrained the discontent of the men-at-arms.

Having thus provided for this most extraordinary portion of his grand project, Cæsar seemed on a sudden to set in motion all the wheels and levers which had been so long combining in secrecy. Migueloto left Sinigaglia at the same time with Sir Reginald, to proceed to Rome, ostensibly with the news of the defeat of the Orsini, but in reality to execute the plans of Cæsar, and by reporting the dangerous state of the country, covered with the shattered, but not crushed partizans of the barons, to retard the progress of Lucrezia until matters were more ripe for her detention at Faenza. This result was, however, obtained without any necessity of taxing the exaggerative eloquence of Don Migueloto.

It is true that the pontiff, on the first receipt of Cæsar's tidings, seized, with circumstances of almost equal treachery, on all the members of the Orsini family in Rome, including the Cardinal and the Archbishop of Florence, and on their fortress palaces, which were stripped of all their rich contents; declared the estates of the whole family forfeit, and proceeded to ravage them with fire and sword, apparently at pleasure. But the return of Fabio Orsino, who escaped by a miracle of chance from Sinigaglia, and the extraordinary valour and conduct displayed by the youth, suddenly revived the spirits and resolution of the partizans of his name. Cæsar himself was astonished with the tidings which reached him on his victorious advance, and it apparently suspended the Borgian resolutions; for he continued to spare the lives, or rather reserve the deaths, of Paolo and the Duke of Gravina, dragging them after him in chains; and Alexander contented himself with imprisoning his victims in Santangelo, permitting them various indulgences, and giving public assurances of their personal safety.

Meanwhile Cæsar lost not an instant in following up his projects, and the tremendous blow at Sinigaglia. He rushed upon Città-di-Castello, which the affrighted heirs of Vitellozzo instantly abandoned, and of which he took possession in the name of the church. At present he respected his treaty with Bologna, only compelling its lords to send him the large succours stipulated, which laid them bare for future attempts, and turned upon Perugia, whence the Baglioni fled in the like manner. Having secured this city with a garrison of his partizans and of factious exiles, he entered the territory of Sienna, and by his direful ravages forced the city to expel his enemy and its lord, Pandolfo Petrucci. But here he was met with such disastrous tidings of the progress of the Orsini, who were masters of the whole Campagna, and threatened Rome itself, that he was compelled to turn from his career of devastation and conquest, and move with his army on Rome. His sudden arrival, it appeared from the confession of some prisoners, foiled a desperate attempt which Fabio Orsino meditated on Rome, to seize the persons of the pontiff and of his daughter, as hostages for his sire and brother's safety. This circumstance kindled Alexander's most violent passions; and when the Orsini, after some bloody struggles, were driven by Cæsar's overwhelming force to take refuge in their castles and fortresses—against the express commands of the King of France, who took Fabio under his protection, and Cæsar's own wish, he ordered him to besiege Bracciano with his whole force, in which Fabio had taken refuge. But Cæsar's policy had also borne its expected fruit in Naples, where the ill success of the French against the Spaniards rendered them more dependent on the goodwill of the pontiff than ever he had been on theirs; and he now utterly despised their entreaties, and even menaces, in behalf of the Orsini.

The news of the suppression of the Orsini revolt, and of the hopeless condition of their young chieftain, had not long reached Faenza ere tidings of the continued progress of Lucrezia were brought. Messengers arrived to hasten the preparations for her reception, and that of her magnificent retinue; and as Faenza was the last of the great cities belonging to the Borgias through which she was to pass, the extraordinary splendour of the rejoicings was accounted for, which was in reality devised as a means of detaining her. At the same time one of Cæsar's most trusted emissaries, Don Ugo of Cordova, arrived with minute instructions to all the parties concerned in effecting the projected manœuvre.

Ferrara is distant from Faenza but one day's journey; and although the great strength of the city, which was completely and massively walled, numerously garrisoned, and provided with every munition of war, enabled it to defy violence, Cæsar's anxiety was directed to persuade the Prince of Ferrara, if possible, that his bride was not detained against her will. In addition to the festivities, which she could not graciously refuse to stay and witness, rumours were to be spread that the Vitelli had fled into the intervening country, under the secret protection of Bologna, and rendered it dangerous to attempt a passage until they were driven out. Meanwhile every artifice was to be exerted to amuse the attention of Lucrezia and her escort; and it was signified to Sir Reginald that, in the former office, the duke principally relied upon him.

And certes the struggle would have been more severe in Le Beaufort's heart, if his knowledge of Cæsar's unholy passion had not convinced him that it was impossible he could intend any success to his own. He felt that all his motions were incessantly watched, and that it was not meant

to trust him with the least real power, which was all exercised by the Bishop of Enna and his own bitter enemy, Peter of Oviedo, whom he had deprived of San Leo, and who commanded in Faenza with the title of lieutenant and authority of chief. Moreover, Lucrezia's love for her betrothed husband could not be doubted; and her ambition and pride were warmly engaged in favour of so great an alliance. And yet Sir Reginald found it utterly impossible, without exposing himself to sudden and useless destruction, to attempt warning Lucrezia of the pitfall laid for her. A jealous vigilance, justified by the disturbed state of the country, was exercised on all who passed in or out of Faenza; and its inhabitants themselves did not guess that they had a new governor within their walls; but rather concluded that the personage so closely pent up and guarded was a prisoner whose detention was of great consequence.

Le Beaufort himself could only form vacant hopes and resolutions to endeavour the balking of Cæsar's plots at every hazard, when the occasion should arrive; and meanwhile he laboured to remove suspicion by submitting to all that was demanded of him without impatience or strangle, as if lured by the glistening bait held out to him to slight all concomitant disadvantages. Nor had he any occasion to feign the passionate eagerness with which he awaited Lucrezia's arrival, and the delight, deeply mingled with perplexity and bitter regret as it must be, with which he anticipated beholding her once more.

At length the approach of the bridal company restored Sir Reginald to some degree of liberty; and on the morning of the day in which Lucrezia was expected in Faenza the English knight received his commission from Don Ugo, as its governor. Yet it was determined by the Bishop of Enna that it would be dangerous for Le Beaufort to appear until she was fairly within the walls; and the apology for the absence of the governor might aptly introduce the subject of the dangers to be apprehended from the Vitelli fugitives, against which they might allege him to be engaged in providing.

In Faenza all was bustle and splendid preparation, and the Faventines vindicated their ancient character for taste and wealth in the welcome which they devised for the sister of their terrible lord. The streets by which she was to reach the palace were decorated with arches of flowers and bridal devices; the city resounded with the merry clamour of all its bells, joyful shouts, music, and continual peals of ordnance. The whole population poured forth in holiday garb, the beggars themselves bedizening their rags with bridal favours; and in the great square before the palace a vast feast was to be given to the people, with dances, plays, and the exhibitions of jongleurs and minstrels, all in the open air; and above all, to divert the bride and her ladies, a race of women was to take place, in which the prize was a white satin smock, and ten gold crowns as a marriage portion to the fair winner.

It was the noon of a glowing summer day when the arrival of two heralds, in the livery of the Dukes of Ferrara and of the Borgias, announced the approach of the bridal retinue. The curiosity of the populace assembled in the great square was somewhat diverted by the appearance of their new governor, who rode out of the castle with his English archers to receive the arriving guests. But they were disappointed in their intended survey, for he wore his visor down; yet the magnificence of his armour and trappings excited great admiration, and gratified the eyes of the populace. With all his doubts and fears Sir

Reginald could not deny himself the advantage which magnificence of garb lent to his noble person, but he persuaded himself that he took so much pains in his military toilet in pursuance of his plan to deceive his capturers.

The procession of the betrothed had entered the walls, and its pompous array shortly appeared descending the principal street from the gates, amidst thundering acclamations, triumphal music of trumpets and drums, and discharge of the small guns of the soldiery who lined the way. Le Beaufort was surprised and somewhat comforted to observe the number and perfect discipline of the Spanish archers and horsemen who formed the guard of the bride, and which also evidently made Monsignor d'Enna muse. These headed the procession, and so great a multitude of servants followed, well armed and in superb liveries, that the prelate's thoughtfulness increased. Then came a number of carriages, covered with costly cloths, containing the bride's wardrobe, and the rich presents made to her by her sire—above all, her dowry of one hundred thousand gold crowns, in specie, a sum which regal profusion had not emulated in those days. Then came a mule, which bore upon its back a couch with cushions, covered with crimson velvet embroidered with flowers, and with pillows of white satin; above which was borne a superb canopy of cloth of gold. In this the young duchess was to repose when wearied of riding on horseback; but she entered the city mounted on the white steed which Le Beaufort well remembered. It was superbly decorated, and she herself wore a magnificent bridal dress, principally composed of silver lace and diamonds wrought in a woof as splendid as if of figured light, with the exquisite skill for which the Italian artists, rather than manufacturers, of the age were renowned. Her face was nearly concealed by the bridal veil which hung to her feet, but its heightened fairness was visible beneath; and the light of the smile with which she bent to the uproarious greetings of the populace seemed like a sunshine piercing it.

Beside her rode the Cardinal of Este, Don Alfonso's brother and procurator, blazing in his scarlet robes; a number of ladies, nobles, knights, and other attendants, both of Rome and Ferrara, followed. But despite this great and gorgeous escort, Lucrezia visibly started when, entering the great square, she beheld the masses of soldiery drawn up to receive her, under her brother's ensigns. But Monsignor d'Enna was instantly beside her, offering the compliments and congratulations of the city; the fluttering of a number of snow-white doves, suddenly released from their cages, increased the confusion; and Lucrezia's attention was immediately caught by the approach of the captain of Faenza.

Something Le Beaufort spoke of compliment or welcome, in so low and confused a tone that Monsignor d'Enna observed in apology that the knight was a foreigner, when Lucrezia interrupted him. "Sir knight, it cannot be that we are so far mistaken as not to remember that voice!" she exclaimed. "And yet, in the service of the Duke of Romagna!—beseech you, raise your visor, and let us see if such witcheries may be."

Sir Reginald obeyed with a deep bend, and Lucrezia started at the pale and agitated countenance revealed, which she remembered blooming with youth and bounding blood. Nevertheless her whole countenance beamed with joy, and she said with a delight which went like a reproach to his heart—"Oh, then, I am all safe—and very, very happy!" and extended her hand with a smile of such absolute confidence and trust that he was nigh overcome with emotion as he bent to kiss it. Probably she

felt the tremble on his lips, for the glance she gave him as she drew it back mingled much of her natural coquetry and vivacity, and shivered through the veins of the knight like a stream of lightning.

Monsignor d'Enna smiled quaintly at Don Ugo, and the procession was ordered to advance. On reaching the castle, the young duchess selected Le Beaufort to assist her in dismounting; and on entering its gloomy halls she looked at him with a shudder, and desired him not to leave her, in a tone which deepened all his inner anguish. But there was something probably in his hesitating and gloomy replies which gave her inquietude; for even on seating herself at the great banquet which had been prepared, she announced to the smiling and bending Monsignor d'Enna that she intended to resume her journey on the following day.

But the Cardinal of Este, a prelate of a good deal more wit than sanctity, laughingly commented on the advantages of a little rest with such a journey before them, and more seriously declared that they must tarry the arrival of a messenger with tidings that all was in readiness in Ferrara. Lucrezia smiled and blushed, and the serenity returned to her most lovely visage. But it troubled over again as she turned to Sir Reginald, and addressing him as the captain of Faenza, inquired if it was true that the Vitelli were abroad, and ravaging the country towards Ravenna? Don Ugo prevented Sir Reginald's reply by giving a most alarming report of the disasters the rebels had caused, their great numbers, their vows of vengeance, and the secret assistance of the Bolognese. Lucrezia became very pale, and turning to the captain of Faenza, she desired him in an eager and almost imploring manner to wait on herself and the cardinal early on the following morning, to devise the measures necessary for her safe progress.

Something peculiar there must have been in Le Beaufort's look in reply to this command, which she probably mistook, as she coloured again very deeply, and the cardinal smiled significantly. This interchange of thought probably increased the trouble and anguish of Le Beaufort; for after regarding him stealthily for some moments, Lucrezia, for the first time, asked a question which had been for a long time on her lips, and inquired how it chanced that she beheld him in Faenza.

Again one of the ever-watchful coadjutors interposed, and Monsignor d'Enna launched into a highflown panegyric on the matchless valour of the English knight, which had led the Duke of Romagna not only to pardon the share he had taken in aid of his rebels, but to desire most earnestly to attach him to his own service.

"His deeds praise him better than your words, monsignor," said Lucrezia, watching with a woman's keenness of observation, and yet unobservedly, the flickering shades of contending passions in Le Beaufort's expression. "Yet I would fain hope that some memory of an ancient friendship worked full as strongly in his heart as any promises and protestations of the Duke of Romagna?"

Le Beaufort had by this time rallied sufficiently to endeavour to play his part; but he somewhat betrayed himself, when he replied with vehemence, "In Sinigaglia, lady, it surely needed some other spell than promises from his grace to win me. But," he added, more considerately, "the Orsini sought my destruction—and what mattered theirs to me?"

Shuddering at these words and the recollections it kindled, Lucrezia shifted the converse to another topic, and it soon became general and animated. The Cardinal of Este was himself a man of wit and observa-

tion, and in his train were several of the polished poets, courtiers, and learned men who made Ferrara famous. Bembo was there, whose platonism now merited the term, or at least had ebbed back to its ancient limits. And there was one Messer Ludovico Ariosto, a young man in the cardinal's service, whose pleasant humour and gaiety had already raised him high in Donna Lucrezia's favour, who was said to prefer the epithalamium he had written for her marriage to all the innumerable tribe of its competitors.

The day concluded in witnessing the diversions in the public square, and the display of fireworks; after which, renewing her command to see him early on the following morning, Lucrezia and her court retired to rest.

Le Beaufort anxiously awaited to hear what conclusions Caesar's emissaries had drawn from the events of the day; and he found with satisfaction that they were alarmed at the number and strength of the bridal escort. Peter of Oviedo had indeed quartered the soldiery in isolated positions, where they might be easily overpowered by his superior force, if the necessity should arise. But their concern was betrayed by the general agreement in Monsignor d'Enna's proposal that Sir Reginald should see Donna Lucrezia without the presence of the Cardinal of Este, and while giving her a good excuse for delay in a frightful picture of the danger to be apprehended from the Vitelli, endeavour with his eloquence to render it palatable to her. Le Beaufort affected not to notice the sneer which mingled in Monsignor d'Enna's tone, but accepted the proposal with all the eagerness to be expected in a hopeful lover, and which Lucrezia's conduct to him somewhat justified in the envious opinion of the colleagues. The bishop had, in truth, received a last instruction from Lucrezia to bring the captain of Faenza to her presence as soon as the cardinal was ready to share the deliberation, and he agreed with Le Beaufort to make a mistake, and lead him to it alone.

In deciding on this point, however, Le Beaufort made a stipulation which, in his frank and daring temperament, seemed quite natural. He declared that if overlooked by any espial he should be unable to touch on recollections which were likely to revive his former favour with Lucrezia, and promote their present views; and therefore he advised Monsignor d'Enna, if he saw any opportunity, to leave them to their own discourse. The prelate looked suspiciously and most negatively at him; but Peter of Oviedo and Ugo of Cordova, with more soldierly heartiness, approved the saying, and clamoured down contradiction by urging the increased difficulties in which they found their task involved.

Monsignor d'Enna was, nevertheless, astonished at the earliness of the summons he received from Lucrezia, and his suspicions had evidently deepened when he found Le Beaufort impatiently expecting his presence. He knew that Lucrezia could not expect the cardinal to be in readiness to hold council so early; and moreover it pleased her to receive the captain of Faenza in a small garden belonging to the palace, the raised terraces of which commanded a fair view of the rich plum-coloured valley of Lamone. Le Beaufort himself was somewhat agitated by the peculiar circumstances of the interview; and his emotion increased when he perceived the young duchess in all the bloom of her beauty, enlivened by the fresh morning air, and *felt* the smile with which she welcomed him from a distance. But his agitation could scarcely be concealed when, after a brief salutation, Lucrezia put her arm in his, and bowing with a gracious

air of dismissal to Monsignor d'Enna, drew the young knight gently leaning on it towards a terrace remote from the whole group.

"Of my evil brother an evil instrument," she said, looking at the bishop, who continued to gaze after them with scowling scrutiny. "But I know that thou art none, my knight of the tournament of the Colosseum; and as well as words can say it, thine eye has told me that thou art Cæsar's captain because he had else been thy executioner!"

"In very truth, lady, I may more truly call myself the prisoner than the captain of Faenza," said Le Beaufort, glancing round with an alarm which visibly excited Lucrezia's fear, knowing that it must be well founded in so valiant a nature.

"Then can my lord repay in some measure the great debt he owes you—for I know all—all your unparalleled generosity!" said Lucrezia, tears glistening in her eyes, "They cannot deny me thine escort from this city, and once out of its walls—which, I know not wherefore, seemed to restrict the free beating of my heart as I entered them—it will be at thine own pleasure to return or accompany me to Ferrara, whose palace shall be your home, whose sovereign your brother, and whose mistress your most grateful, constant,—ay, and loving friend! Let Italy become your native land, and let Lucrezia d'Este inherit the champion of Lucrezia Borgia!"

"Lady!—and do you deem it possible? Possible that I, who grudge that any eye but mine should gaze upon your loveliness!—to behold you in his arms—to hear your children call him father! Oh, it is impossible, it is impossible to suffer this and live!" exclaimed Le Beaufort; but observing the alarm he had excited in Lucrezia, he added with a sad smile, "And, lady, after what has been, are even you assured that the prince would welcome such an escort?"

"Since he himself is to be of the company, what can he fear?" replied Lucrezia, with a vague and timorous smile, yet with great anxiety in her eyes. "And of this I was to speak: for since they tell me of the dangers from the Vitelli, I must confess to you, captain of Faenza,—that my lord would needs compel me—that, forsooth, he will not tarry my arrival in Ferrara, but this sunset should be with us here, in his ancient disguise of a Knight of St. John, to escort me thither, under I know not what pretext, to convince men that he has never been his own rival!"

The deep blush which at first dyed the cheek of the young bride faded into extreme paleness, when raising her eyes in astonishment at the prolonged silence of Sir Reginald, she perceived his aghast and terror-stricken look.

"And, therefore," she continued hastily, "I would beseech you to send forth your power—for I am pledged not to suffer a lance of mine own to leave me—to guard the ways, and bring him to Faenza in safety; or if this may not be, at whatever risk or unexpectedness, I must hasten—something too eagerly as it may seem—to meet my lord."

"Now, indeed, is all lost, and I discern wherefore the traitorous duke chose this near city to Ferrara, believing that a bridegroom's impatience, and the lull of suspicion—all is lost!" said Le Beaufort wildly. "Hell has taught him all her subtleties, and now indeed are we entangled—all—in an inextricable snare!"

"Le Beaufort! speak—what is this ecstasy?" said Lucrezia, much agitated. "Nay, if I am to be frightened thus, I will leave your city instantly. Or dost thou deem that I—that I, Le Beaufort—that a woman—indeed,

indeed, I strove to shun this rashness ; and on my faith I have forewarned him he shall profit nothing by his frowardness !”

“ I do believe thee, lady ; but, alack, thou knowest not how,” said Sir Reginald, his eye wandering despairingly over the lofty and well-guarded walls. “ Is there no escape from this great trap ? It seems but a leap to liberty ; and yet are we barred in the slaughter-house, and wait but the butcher’s axe !”

“ I will depart ere I have broken my fast—I will not tarry with your terrors,” said Lucrezia pettishly, but trembling all over. “ Farewell !—since you take pleasure to affright me thus—and keep your prince’s palace for himself.”

“ Lady, they will not suffer you to leave it thus to the devil’s use,” said Le Beaufort. “ Hear me, and then if you will, essay to break the spell that clips you in, perchance to horrors of which fiends dare scarcely dream—me and thy bridegroom to certain slaughter !”

“ Speak out, or apprehension will kill me !” exclaimed the lady, sinking on the pedestal of a statue which was strangely overgrown with a flowering green weed.

“ Even now Cæsar must be in Rome, with his potent army, master of all things, and daring all !” ejaculated Le Beaufort.

“ Nay, for my sire’s last words were a solemn promise to me never to allow Cæsar’s bands to enter the city unless his own life or sovereignty was endangered,” said Lucrezia, eagerly watching the effect of her words.

“ And then both perchance were at extremity !” said Le Beaufort.

“ Or fear you the influence of his creatures in the consistory ?” she continued. “ But that is over, and the balance is restored with friends to the peace of Italy, to Ferrara, and to me.”

“ All is in vain ! A consistory of angels might scarcely save us now,” said Le Beaufort ; and with a rapidity which would have rendered him unintelligible to a less apt listener, he related Cæsar’s revelation to him at Sinigaglia, and the project to execute which he had been sent to Faenza, without even hesitating in divulging the extraordinary part assigned to himself. The great force which environed them, and the nigh hopelessness of any extrication, needed scarcely his statement to be comprehended by Lucrezia.

Yet, after a long and aghast pause of incredulity, wonder, and overwhelming conviction, the bright intelligence of Lucrezia seemed not to have deserted her.

“ If this be their prodigies project, surely these heavens will not look calmly down to see it perfect’d !” she said, clasping her hands upward. “ Madonna, help !—and perchance my thought even now is of her suggestion. Hast thou none whom thou canst trust in this matter of life and death to bear a message forth ?”

“ All of mine own riders ; but a fly that bore a tinge of my livery were not suffered to leave the city,” replied Le Beaufort.

“ Softly, and we may yet invert this treachery on its planners,” said Lucrezia. “ Since they would have us renew our ancient friendship, tell them I am something reconciled to stay by thine eloquence—the rather that the Prince of Ferrara hath vexed me by a fearful retreat from his pledge to meet me in Faenza. And thereupon, as a jealous rival, or a lover that would secure his good, suggest to them a plan by which to entrap Alfonso still ; for they will grieve to think so sweet a morsel of their treason should be snatched from them. Say, that to excuse my

delay, thou hast won me to write, as in a womanly pettishness at a slight, to Alfonso, bidding him attend me privily in Faenza, or look not to see me hurriedly in Ferrara. And add that I will trust no messenger but one whose foreign tongue may keep him from babbling—one at your devotion; and he—oh, he may meet my lord in time to bring him, not alone, but with such force as a prince should ride withal, which, with those within of my company, shall awe the traitors from their purpose."

Sir Reginald assented with great eagerness to a proposal which was the first glimpse of hope he had discerned in the universal darkness. Nor had he any time to offer objections, if he had felt any, for Monsignor d'Enna now appeared, approaching them with the Cardinal of Este.

"And 'tis fit to deceive the traitor's villainous interpretation—nay, it should not offend Alfonso himself—to see me circled in thy brotherly embrace!—here is my band—do with it what thou wilt," said Lucrezia. And as Sir Reginald knelt, and with no acted passion covered it with kisses, she drew her hand away, stepped a few paces from him, then turned, and laughingly blew on it as if returning him his kisses, and placidly resumed his arm ere she affected to perceive the approach of the two prelates; and then Monsignor d'Enna might well mistake her glance at him for one of guilty fear and trouble.

CHAPTER LI.

"I thought mine enemies had been but man,
But spirits may be leagued with them—all Earth
Abandons—Heaven forgets me:—in the dearth
Of such defence the Powers of Evil can,
It may be, tempt me further, and prevail
Against the ou-ward creature they assail."—BYRON.

While these events took place in Faenza the catastrophe of the too real drama was hastening on with equal rapidity in Rome.

We shift the scene to the Castle of Sant'Angelo, an hour or two after sunset, in a gallery of which the castellan, Migueloto, was fretfully perambulating, examining doors and windows, and pausing at times to listen—when suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder. Starting round, he discerned a figure attired in the coarse garb of some sutler or other follower of a camp, and his hand was on his dagger when the stranger raised the broad lappels of his hat, and disclosed the features of the Duke of Romagna.

"Hope has a light step, for I have walked in your footsteps these minutes, and yet you caught no echo," he said. "Be not amazed to see me in Rome, for I am at Bracciano, asleep in my tent.—What are the news with ye?"

"The Datary, signor, has been seized with a sudden and most dangerous cholice," replied the castellan, gravely.

"And strange things his holiness has said thereupon, in the hearing of a friend of mine," replied Cæsar, gloomily. "I tell thee, man, we have no time to lose. She is at Faenza, and my plans succeed so well, that, by the treachery of the loving Knight of England, Alfonso of Ferrara must even now be in my power! But the rogue himself—and it is just—will not live to enjoy the fruit of his crime, wherewith vengeance travels abreast."

"In very truth 'tis wondrous how my lord finds a handle to all men,"

said Migueloto, in a somewhat remorseful and quivering tone. " Yet methinks it will avail me something that I have in a manner made a Christian of poor Miriam."

" Thou!" exclaimed Cæsar, with a laugh of utter incredulity.

" She is dying fast, for the air of dungeons is very withering when one is young, and her thoughts eat into her," said the tender-hearted castellan. " So, when we take the monk from his torture, and give him breath awhile, I have suffered her admission to his presence; and he hath discoursed her into blessed and calm moods, wherein she weeps so that it does one good to see her."

" Thou, too, hast dared to disobey me, then!" exclaimed Cæsar fiercely.

" Nay, my lord, since the order came we have not relaxed his punishment an instant," replied Migueloto.

" And she is dying, thou sayest? But it cannot be of dungeon air, since Fiamma lives," returned the Borgia.

" Ay, but Fiamma hath some great hope that comforts her, though in faith 'tis nothing heavenly, since she laughs when I bid her think of repentance," said Migueloto.

" Why, since thou believest still in this detected impostor, the mob will worship him," said Cæsar in a pleased tone. " Lead to his dungeon; I must speak with him."

The castellan immediately obeyed, and led the way to a subterraneous cell beneath the gardens of the castle, at so great a depth that all light was lost, and the air smelt foul and rank as if in a sepulchre.

Cæsar entered the friar's dungeon alone, for he took the lamp from Migueloto, and desired him to wait outside. Even with the aid of the light, which burned palely and sickly in the noisome air, it was some moments ere he could discern the object of which he came in search. But gradually he perceived the person of Fra Bruno, linked to the wall by a chain that scarcely permitted him to range beyond a heap of musty straw, which formed his bed, or rather lair. On this he was seated, gathered up in a singular couchant attitude, his eyes closed, and muttering aloud, interrupted only by the regular tric-troc of a drop of water which oozed through a hole in the wall, and fell perpetually with the same eternal monotony of splash. It is said that the exceeding torture inflicted by this unvarying and regular sound often vanquished the obstinacy of criminals on whom the rack had exhausted its agonies in vain.

Listening for a few instants, Cæsar distinguished some words of that most dismal soliloquy—" Fiend, thou liest—for I believe! I do but pray for a sign, that I may believe without doubting. Tric-troc!—yes, for ever and for ever! Man cannot escape it—two thoughts equally balanced!—Tric-troc!—But how long? Oh, how blessed were it but one sound—tric-tric, or tric-troc, for ever! But tric-troc!—How long, how long!—only let it drop a little faster! I am not impatient, but my brain will burst! But no, no, no!—tric-troc, tric-troc! through all darkness, all eternity?"

" The sign is come—awake, arise!" said Cæsar, throwing the flare of his lamp suddenly on the Dominican, who leaped up with a loud rattle of his chain; but the radiance, feeble as it was, blinded him for the moment. " I see the light of thy presence, but not thy form," he exclaimed. " Art thou an angel, or but the mocking fiend who heaps upon my brain mountains of thought too heavy to be borne?"

" I am not an angel," replied Cæsar, calmly. " Albeit women hold me

of a goodly personage. But methinks thou something rememberest of me?"

"Devil, avaunt! Hast thou taken that form, having failed in hers, to make me blaspheme?" exclaimed the prisoner frenziedly. "I spat in thy face—I dashed thee from mine arms—albeit thou worest all her loveliness, and wooed me in her voice's most marvellous melody!"

"Devil I may be; but the devils, too, are constrained to work the good purposes of heaven," replied Cæsar, sedately. "I come to release thee from thy chains and thy tric-troc; to bid thee go forth and tell the people, who already hold thee for a miracle-worker, that thou hast a commission from on high to reform the church, to reduce it to the humility and holiness of apostolic times, and that one is appointed to be thy sword in the great work—whose name is Cæsar Borgia."

The monk looked vacantly at Cæsar as he uttered these words; but he scarcely seemed to comprehend his meaning, repeating them with a strange, wondering expression, as if in a vain endeavour to understand the thoughts conveyed. Cæsar patiently awaited the result, assiduously aiding the efforts of Fra Bruno's intellect by repetitions.

"Alexander's attention will soon be absorbed in matters of his own; the Colonnas are astir in Rome, to take advantage of our Orsini warfare out of it," he continued. "But, if not, I swear that I will protect thee in thy labours. This castle shall be thy retreat—thy appearances out of it so many miracles."

"Thou, Cæsar Borgia, to aid in this work!" said Fra Bruno, vacantly.

"Thou shalt believe me, then! Monk or sorcerer, or both, dost thou hear?" exclaimed Cæsar, impatiently.

"I hear," replied Fra Bruno, but the question was not uncalled for, so statue-like was his countenance.

"Guelf and Ghibelline, tiger and wolf, couch not together—I tell thee there is about to be an emperor in Rome," said Cæsar. "And hast thou not, before heaven and earth, denounced the marriage of Lucrezia Borgia as a mortal sin against both?"

The effect of these words was so instantaneous, that there was something which might indeed be considered miraculous in it. The half-soddened intellect suddenly revivified; the wandering thoughts became fixed, and the Dominican exclaimed, with a look whose fierceness even startled the Borgia, "Who denies but damns himself!"

"Not I, for I have ventured on a most perilous deed to prevent it," said Cæsar. "Lucrezia is as yet but wedded by procuration, and even now she is my prisoner in Faenza."

"Thy prisoner—in Faenza!"

"Confessor! there is no need to tell thee that Cæsar Borgia would rather perish than suffer Lucrezia to become the wife of Alfonso of Ferrara—of one whom she loves so passionately, that for the first time her matchless beauty will truly be possessed!" said Cæsar, with a demoniac look. "And, monk, listen when I tell thee, that, albeit thou hast withstood all my torments, I know wherefore thou batest me too much, because—thou hast loved her too well!"

Fra Bruno's head sank on his breast, and even its ghostly dungeon-tints became suffused; but after a long pause, he replied only, "And she is thy prisoner in Faenza, on her way to Ferrara?"

"To her husband, to its prince! Dost thou know that Alfonso is the same whom she loved as the Knight of St. John?" continued Cæsar.

"Ever I knew it, ever I knew it, from the day we met at the torrent of Velino! But destiny is mightier than its wave; and she is thy prisoner, in Faenza?" replied the monk, hurriedly.

"And ere the certainty is known either to herself or to her sire, I must be master in Rome, or betake me for shelter—whither? Scarcely the grave can yield it," said Cæsar. "Therefore, I would have thee spread tidings of the event at hand abroad among the superstitious populace; and with thy tumults and those of the Colonnas compel the pontiff to call my ensigns into Rome. Then am I master—then shalt thou reform the church to what poverty and lowness thy barefoot fancies lead thee. Nay, I have such a miracle in store for thee as shall persuade the most incredulous that thy errand drops from above."

"What miracle? There are some more miraculous than those the vulgar call so," said Fra Bruno, after pausing for a moment in ecstatic ruminations.

"I purpose, when my plan is ripened, to give a feast to the new cardinals,—but thou hast not heard—nine in number, all rich, and all mine enemies, whose inheritance my new estate will rejoice in and need," said Cæsar. "Thou shalt appear at it with gazers to report—accuse them of their simony, and in proof of their crime and thy mission invoke some sudden vengeance on their heads. And thereupon I tell thee not one will leave that feast alive, but all droop their heads, and die like scalded poppies in the sun."

"Misfortune makes men doubt—how is this miracle to come to pass?" said Fra Bruno, after a short silence.

"Fie, thou wilt cheat none, if thou dost not first cheat thyself," replied Cæsar. "Canst thou doubt thou hast interest in heaven to make thy curses lightning?"

"Yea—for thou standest before me unblasted!" replied the Dominican. "Thou seest I dissemble not."

"Neither will I. The dames of the Ghetto, who also inhabit in this tomb, have assisted me to bottle some rare wines," said Cæsar, tranquilly folding his arms.

"But dost thou not fear that chance may for once be guided by some angel, and put the draught in thine own chalice?" replied Fra Bruno, with a dark glance upward.

"The butlers are my true servants, and the precious wines reserved for my friends are all distinguished by an infallible token," replied Cæsar, laughing, and yet with some anger at the bare supposition of so gross a miscarriage.

"But to call down a miracle, and none to follow, what manner of saint were I then?" said Fra Bruno, after another pause of profound rumination. "Cæsar, I understand thee; but art thou certain that the poison is deadly, tasteless, and too finely mingled to be discerned?"

"This essay 'tis my intent to make," replied Cæsar, thoughtfully. "I am weary of these hags, whose direful practices, against which all the guards of Nero are disarmed, may return upon the user,—and I have promised them their liberty! Truly, if they who mingled the draught partake of it unwittingly, who can detect the impalpable essence in it?"

"And this were justice," said Fra Bruno, raptly. "And thou wilt set them free, not only from their dungeon of stone, but that of their withered and despised and age-aching carcasses?"

"Even so."

"Release me, then—tric-troc! I recognise the sign; I will fulfil the mission," exclaimed Fra Bruno, with a species of enthusiasm which excited the suspicion of the ever-wakeful Borgia.

"Yet, mark thou well, friar," he said, "and I pray thee believe me, when I tell thee that thy every step will be closely followed by one who knows how to use what he hath in his hand."

"Thou hast said I am a sorcerer, but it seems believest not thyself," replied Fra Bruno, with a fearful smile. "Be it even so; if I am sold to any devil, 'tis—to thee!"

CHAPTER LII.

"Fain would I teach my soul forgetfulness;
And yet, I know not how, my legend shapes
Things that have been, in limnings of disguise."
Minstrel's Prologue.

It seemed that Monsignor d'Enna, with all his craft, was deceived by the device of Lucrezia, his belief in the jealousy and hatred which he supposed to animate the English knight, and his eagerness to secure so great an advantage to his master as the possession of Alfonso of Ferrara's person must be. Bampton was the messenger whom he permitted to depart from Faenza with the ensnaring epistle.

To sustain the illusion, Lucrezia was compelled to add to Le Beaufort's sufferings by the tenderness and familiarity in which she indulged him. It might be that something of regret and even, as Cæsar had predicted, of warmer feeling passed through her heart, at times contrasting the fervour and humility of Le Beaufort's passion with the calmness and mastery of that of her betrothed, which had rather subdued than won the love of a nature so fraught with the volcanic fire of her clime, and showed itself far beyond her intent or suspicion. And then began the most violent and terrible of the many struggles which had torn the soul of Le Beaufort in the phases of his disastrous passion, when he felt and yet dared not confess to himself the slight but exquisite change in her demeanour, in which compassion and gratitude had melted into something he knew not what—and dared not conjecture, lest his worst agony should return.

The violence of his inward feelings could not always be concealed, and some slight shadows of suspicion and doubt perhaps crossed Lucrezia's mind. But night came and no Alfonso, who, if he had not received a warning, was to have arrived in Faenza; and her confidence returned in full tide, with an overflow of tenderness and gratitude, which, considering the cause, filled Le Beaufort with unutterable anguish and despair. Nay, there were moments when his generosity lost its heroic strain, and dark musings on the feasibility of Cæsar's plot sullied the chivalric brightness of his reveries. But the fiendish shadows found no abiding place in that loyal and devoted spirit, and he unweariedly pursued the dangerous and difficult task he had marked out for himself. He informed Monsignor d'Enna that his suit prospered even to his own wonder; which it certainly did to that of the prelate himself, since it began to cause him uneasiness lest the love-making instructions should be carried out farther than was dreamed by the grand conspirator. Le Beaufort

even declared that he doubted not of ultimate success if Lucrezia could be made to believe that she was slighted by her bridegroom, and therefore it was essentially necessary that his capture should be accomplished secretly, and not revealed until it might have become a source of congratulation to herself, and that meanwhile she should imagine her summons treated with neglect or contempt, or with a mistrust still more offensive to her proud heart. Under pretext of scouring the country to clear it of the Vitelli, strong parties of horse might be sent out on all the roads by which it was possible to approach Faenza, with instructions to secure the Knight of St. John, and bring him privately a prisoner into the city at nightfall, by a gate at which Sir Reginald would himself keep watch with his archers.

Monsignor d'Enna apparently fell completely into this snare, and the captain of Faenza beheld on the following day, with satisfaction, that the city was emptied of a considerable number of Cæsar's most ferocious and determined soldiery in scattered parties over the champaign towards Ferrara. But the delight with which Lucrezia now looked forward to the arrival of Alfonso, and counted the moments, even mingled with all her affection and gratitude to himself, inflicted sufferings so acute upon him that Lucrezia noticed a strange alteration in his manner, and the gloomy suspicions which had visited her returned in still darker colours. Doubts of his good faith crossed her mind, and a terrible apprehension seized her that she had herself devised the plan by which her lord was to be betrayed—for the letter was written for Monsignor d'Enna's perusal, and was in truth an irresistible lure to a lover and a bridegroom, and the saving message was confided to the vassal of a rival! These suspicions deepened when, towards the hour at which it was possible that the Prince of Ferrara could arrive, Sir Reginald disappeared, and she learned only that he was on the ramparts, engaged in receiving his returning scouts, for as the part of the project he was now executing entailed the greatest personal risk upon himself, he had concealed it from her.

Aware, however, of the necessity of having Lucrezia's escort in readiness to second his plans, Sir Reginald determined to confide in Bembo, whose instrumentality would give little suspicion, and who might secretly inform Lucrezia's attendants of the expected arrival of the prince, who, although incognito, would anticipate the reception due to his high rank. To impress the importance of his communication on Bembo, he threw out hints of danger and of the necessity of secrecy, which the canon seemed to understand with great readiness and amplitude, if his tremulous assent and looks might be trusted.

Le Beaufort, however, had not long taken up his post of dreary expectation on the rampart over the Ferrara gate, with his English men-at-arms, ere he was startled by a most unexpected visit. The young duchess, accompanied by a retinue of her ladies and attendants and a guard, ascended the ramparts, and joined him on them as he stood leaning in a most melancholy mood over a battlement, watching the setting of the sun, at which it was possible and probable that Alfonso could arrive.

The captain of Faenza advanced to receive his illustrious visitant, and he was amazed at the change which a few short hours had made in Lucrezia, the singular expression of fierceness and anguish which had succeeded to the usual feminine sweetness and gaiety of her countenance.

“I have come to watch with you, captain, for time passes tediously in yonder dungeon, which its owners call a palace; and the free evening air

may clear my fancy of some dismal thoughts that haunt it," she said, hurriedly. "Moreover, I would speak with you alone."

The attendants hearing these words, opened their ranks, and remained in conversation with one another, while the lady passed on with the wondering Le Beaufort, who was also somewhat vexed at the observation which this visit must draw to a part from which he wished it to be directed.

"Le Beaufort, I have trusted in thee—and despite the whisperings of a fiend I will trust in thee, until with mine own eyes I behold thy perfidy manifest!" she exclaimed, as soon as they were out of hearing, but with excessive wildness and agitation. "Monsignor d'Enna has been with me. He has warned me not to put any trust in thee; that thou hast organized a mutiny in thy garrison; won Cæsar's soldiers to serve thy treason; hast projected my seizure!—nay, that he fears thou hast devised some plan to prevent all communication with my friends, since he overheard thee giving commands to the various troops of thy scouts sent abroad to *slay a certain Knight of St. John* coming hither with tidings from Ferrara; whose bleeding corpse presented at these gates is to be the signal for thy open treason, and my destruction!"

Sir Reginald looked at the lady for some moments in silent amazement, and then exclaimed with a start—"This, then, was their murderous hope and plan!"

"But hear me, Le Beaufort!—thou seest me here, but thou knowest not that I have ordered my whole array to attend at the gates below," continued Lucrezia. "If my foolish compassion and trust have given thee hope and means to execute thy barbarous enterprise, know that I await here for the arrival of Alfonso—living, to owe thee my existence in gratitude!—dead, to avenge him even with my own hand on thy remorseless treachery, for I will slay thee—yea, I—that never harmed aught living—I will give thee to the axes of my soldiery without a tear or a pause!"

This last blow nigh vanquished Sir Reginald; he could not utter a single word in reply, but merely pointed to the setting sun, bowed his head on his breast, and remained absorbed in grief.

Lucrezia, it is probable, would have made some further effort to obtain a solution of her dreadful doubts, but Monsignor d'Enna himself now appeared upon the ramparts. Without affecting to notice the agitation of the interlocutors, he communicated an anxiety partly true and partly meant to increase suspicion, by observing to the captain of Faenza on the singular fact that none of the riders whom he had despatched towards Ferrara had returned.

"They have heard perchance of some body of Vitelli, and are joining their lances to return in safety," said Le Beaufort, with a strong effort at calmness; and Monsignor d'Enna gave an emphatic glance at the duchess, who replied by a dreary gaze at her soldiery, now rapidly assembling below. This, then, Sir Reginald perceived, was the plot. Alfonso assassinated, and his death declared to be effected by his means; Lucrezia either to take his life, or share the ignominy of the imputed crime with him!

The impatience and terror of Lucrezia increased with every passing instant; and now the sun was below the horizon, and yet no sign of a single spear advancing to her deliverance! She answered Monsignor d'Enna's discourse evidently without knowing what she said, and her eyes

frequently fell with a devouring expression of anxiety and terror on Sir Reginald. The anguish of the scene became almost insupportable to the latter; and even Monsignor d'Enna began to show signs of agitation, and to renew his inquiries concerning the scouts. At last, perceiving that Alfonso came not—maddened and desperate with the perfidy which surrounded him—Le Beaufort began to ruminiate the most violent extremities. The assemblage of Lucrezia's escort gave him hopes that a sudden revelation of her danger, and the surprise, might put Faenza indeed into his hands, and thus secure her safety; and apprehensive only for her in the tumult which must ensue, he at length urged that the night was darkening in, and entreated the lady to retire. But the significance of his manner and earnestness put the crown on her doubts and fears, and instead of complying, she started up, and exclaimed ravingly—“No, traitor!—I will await his slaughtered body here, and see thy head severed in expiation ere I depart!”

Even as she spoke Monsignor d'Enna suddenly exclaimed—“What banners are yonder? Surely we sent not our main strength thus abroad?”

“It is the banner of Alfonso of Este and his host!” said Le Beaufort, after a moment's intent gazing in the direction indicated. “And now, lady, let your headsman come! His stroke is kinder than your words!”

“Where is Don Ugo?—this is marvellous!” exclaimed Monsignor d'Enna, suddenly turning to retire, but Le Beaufort's hand was upon him.

“On thy life, stir not—or, consecrated frocksman as thou art, I will show that I am captain of Faenza, and will be obeyed by all within its walls,” said Le Beaufort. “Stir not, or this axe is on thy treacherous and plotting skull, which for oncee simple honesty has foiled!”

“Le Beaufort! my hero! my knight! and wilt thou not forgive me?” exclaimed Lucrezia, her overwrought spirit yielding in a rush of tears.

“Open the gates, archers, to our friends—and wind the horns to bid them hasten!” was Le Beaufort's only reply; and the advancing squadrons were now so near that they heard and answered the blasts of the trumpets by setting spurs to their jaded steeds. Le Beaufort himself was among those who thrust the gates open, to receive the riders—foremost of whom was a Knight Hospitaller of St. John.

The captain of Faenza was, however, not among those who hurried to witness the meeting between the illustrious lovers; nor, indeed, until the whole group of ladies had returned to the palace, and the prince himself sought him out, attended by his chief officers and knights, did the dignitary present himself to notice. But this coldness might vanish in the close and long embrace with which the Prince of Ferrara greeted his ancient friend, and no trace of it appeared in the immediate assent of the captain to his request, that, to avoid incommoding the unexpected visitors, his own troops should seek their lodging for the night in the neighbouring villages. Something there might be of shrinking and unwillingness in the manner in which, after making the necessary arrangements, Le Beaufort followed the prince to the presence of his beautiful bride; but it melted away in a strange and violent flood of emotion, when Lucrezia rushed to meet them, weeping with unutterable joy and gratitude, and snatching both his hands implored his pardon with passionate fervour for her unjust suspicions. Then observing the pallor which almost instantly succeeded the flush on Sir Reginald's face, when Alfonso smilingly declared that his

jealousy was roused, she said, “ Oh, pardon me, that I may sleep to-night, for though both my warriors shall watch together to keep my rest secure, my conscience will else leave me none ! ”

And yet but little of that night was devoted to sleep, so many and various and infinitely interesting to each other were the events to be detailed and discussed, although no farther apprehension was entertained of Cæsar’s Faventine conspiracy. The Ferrarese force was already more than equal to that of the garrison of Faenza, and a still more considerable body might be expected at dawn ; and as soon after its arrival as possible the prince and his bride were to depart for Ferrara. Thither both warmly pressed Sir Reginald to accompany them ; but he refused with a kind of acrimony—and it was strange that Lucrezia blushed, and turned away from the gaze of her lover-husband with a sigh. And it was then that Sir Reginald announced his determination to return secretly to Rome, and endeavour to save the Orsini by declaring Cæsar’s conspiracy to the pontiff, which their submission and alliance would enable him to withstand.

The necessity of putting the pontiff on his guard had overcome Lucrezia’s aversion to afflict him with the revelations of Cæsar’s perfidy and treason. Moreover, it was probable that the failure of a part of his plan, which required him to precipitate the rest, might incline him to more rational counsels. But the peril to which Sir Reginald must expose himself made her passionate in her entreaties that he would allow her to select some other messenger, without moving him from his resolution ; until the warmth and eagerness of her appeal brought a cloud even to Alfonso’s brow. Le Beaufort urged that none other would have the necessary zeal with which the wrong he had done the Orsino inspired him, nor had the same irrefragable proofs to offer of Cæsar’s guilt. Whatever suspicion his conduct might occasion, the emissaries of Cæsar could not be assured of his complicity in the rescue ; and his daring to return to Rome was an argument of his innocence. But Lucrezia would not be satisfied, until at length, himself observing Alfonso’s gloom, he promised to accompany them towards Ferrara, as if intending to go thither, and then to take the road back to Rome in some disguise which would conceal him from Cæsar’s vengeance.

Day broke upon this conference, and Alfonso earnestly entreated his rescued bride to retire and take some repose ; and again the colour deserted Sir Reginald’s cheeks, and flamed beautifully over Lucrezia’s.

“ ‘Tis true that I must learn to obey, but yet I will condition with you, signor, for that I am yet trembling with my fears, that you will promise me to watch to-night with your brother-in-arms,” she said, in her sweetest and most irresistible tones. “ And so, my lord, until we meet again in this chamber, which I make my guard-room, good morrow ; and you, Sir Reginald, you—good night ! ”

Le Beaufort now felt that his main difficulty was to win Bampton’s consent to his purpose, who had cheerfully staked his life, and executed his master’s will with such prudence and success, in the hope that his Italian adventures would certainly conclude in the rescue of Lucrezia. Unbounded, therefore, was the disappointment of the old man when he learned Sir Reginald’s intention of returning to Rome, by the instructions which he gave him to lead his archers on to Ferrara, whither he expected shortly to follow, and proceeding thence, to take shipping at Venice.

“Ever the thought hath been with me that I should never see Redwood again, nor my daughter, and the white-haired boy, her son,” the ancient vassal said, tears streaming unrestrainedly from his eyes. “For, to deem that I will ever leave you, Master Reginald, while there is strength left in my old limbs to crawl after you, is even to call me a false and disloyal knave. Wherefore I will not, but will follow you even to the death, to which I know you wend—St. Botolph be merciful, and some plague light on the bright, deceiving women of this land!”

Le Beaufort was well acquainted with the obstinacy of his old squire, but he essayed to turn him from his resolution by all arguments—even the additional danger to which he exposed himself of a discovery—but in vain; and he was obliged to yield.

Sunrise brought a considerable increase to the great military retinue which was in readiness to attend the Prince of Ferrara and his bride to their capital. But the reinforcement was scarcely needed, for Le Beaufort had retaliated their lessons on Cæsar’s deputies, and suffered no one to leave Faenza under any pretext, so that it was impossible to assemble any force capable of resisting that of Alfonso. And before the neighbouring garrisons of Cæsar could learn the news, the bridal array poured out of Faenza, escorted by the captain himself and his English, in great magnificence, and accompanied by the tumultuous acclamations and joyful wishes of the unconscious Faventines.

At Ravenna all danger ceased, for there began the well-watched frontiers of the states of Venice—fast friends of the house of Este, and exasperated enemies of the Borgias. It was about the termination of the vast pine forest, which extended even to the frontiers of Ferrara, that Lucrezia, who was so absorbed in conversation with her lord that even her compassionate tenderness had for awhile not noticed Le Beaufort’s absence, was somewhat startled to perceive a cavalier, arrayed in the dark weeds of the Knights of St. John, which Alfonso’s wear had familiarised in her sight, who rode towards her with his visor down, and attended by a single, grey-bearded man-at-arms, as darkly liveried.

Dismounting, raising the bars of his helmet, and kneeling at her stirrup, it was Sir Reginald le Beaufort who asked in a faltering tone her latest commands for Rome.

“With humblest reverence and love to his holiness, these,” she replied in a troubled voice, and drawing a paper from her bosom. “Herein I have commended you to his implicit credence, and your safety so specially to his care that I request it of his grace by this ring, which when my father gave me he promised should never accompany any petition of mine in vain. Take it, good and valiant and loyal knight! and be those robes as fortunate to thee as my lord would have me think—they have been to him!”

“Then, lady, they must be mine for ever!” replied Le Beaufort, in a voice which he in vain endeavoured to make clear and steady.

“Not so, not so, O, *mon Le Beaufort!*” she said, bending over him to hide her emotion, but tears fell sparkling and fast from her eyes. “Not so!—But rather thou shalt promise me to bring thy sweet English bride—the maiden of thy troth—to see her husband’s friends in Italy—wherein we shall not be forgotten that dwell in Ferrara! Gratitude cannot pay thee—therefore I will speak of none.—But yet,” she added, with her most bewitchingly sweet and tender smile, “my lord will pardon me when—remembering that thy first kiss was but rudely welcomed—let this—*our* last!—take the bee’s sting out with his honey.”

And bending suddenly from her steed she pressed her lips gently and very tenderly to the brow of Sir Reginald—but, retreat as rapidly as she might, not until his own had returned the precious boon were they withdrawn!

“Pardon me, lady,” were his latest words to Lucrezia d’Este; “all time cannot efface this moment; and for its duration, I will take no other farewell!”

And in truth, in whatever distant scenes and times, when was that moment altogether forgotten by Reginald le Beaufort? and how oft would the gleam of the sun through glades far remote bring back the pinewood forest, the rustle of the gloomy branches, the snow-white steed, and the bending lady and the warlike halt around, and the smile mingled with its tears, and the gentle pressure of those sweetest lips!—until it seemed as if indeed existence was but one long, lingering echo of his own latest word—Farewell!

CHAPTER LIII.

“ If that the Heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
‘Twill come.
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.”—*King Lear*.

Le Beaufort’s sole hope and object was now in his project of preserving the Orsini, and avenging himself on Cæsar by the exposure of his villainy and the ruin of his mighty projects of ambition. He had taken care that no messenger left Faenza up to the moment of his departure, and he confided that Cæsar’s emissaries would exhaust every effort at retrieval ere they dared to send the intelligence of their failure to him, and that the messenger of ill news would make no peculiar speed. Yet he hurried on his perilous mission with restless activity, following the line of Cæsar’s destructive march; and the rapidity of his journey was proved by the fact that on the second day of his travel, descending to cross the Tiber at the ferry opposite Orte, in a forest which filled the valley on each side, a black pedestrian overtook the knight and his squire, glanced at them, and hastened past with inconceivable rapidity. Sir Reginald, in his deep and now habitual reverie, scarcely noticed the phantom, which he perhaps thought was some Moorish slave making his escape; but Bampton instantly whirled his cross-bow round from his shoulder, carefully set the bolt—and in the twinkling of an eye even the rapid messenger was overtaken, and fell to the ground with a stroke so mortal, that he uttered but one wild-beast yell and expired.

Le Beaufort’s wonder at this extraordinary act of violence on the part of his squire only subsided when he recognised in the slain Cæsar’s swift African runner, Zeid. He then readily lent his assistance to Bampton to draw the carcass into the wood, there to be devoured by its kindred wolves, and aided him to search for any missives of which the runner might be bearer. They found only a few lines, but those were valuable, as testimony from Monsignor d’Enna, distractedly informing the duke that his whole project at Faenza was ruined by the treason of the English knight; that Alfonso and his bride were safely arrived in Ferrara; and that to provide for the worst, himself and his other servants in Romagna would assemble all possible force, and march to join him in Rome.

Continuing his journey with unabated diligence, Le Beaufort entered the ravaged patrimony of St. Peter, but near Bracciano he overtook a company of travellers, the object of whose journey seemed of a kind to supersede his own.

Le Beaufort had purposely delayed his passage through the country of Bracciano until nightfall, to avoid meeting with the scouring parties of the besiegers; but on an eminence which commanded a view of the lake of Bracciano, and the vast black masses of the Orsini castle, surrounded by innumerable watch-fires, he fell in with a dreary company. Some half-dozen men-at-arms, with torches in their hands, bearing the Orsini badge, and seemingly under guard or care of a larger party of Miguelotto's most select ruffians, among whom was the noted bandit and assassin, John of the Catacombs, escorted a lofty car, canopied and hung with black velvet, richly emblazoned with heraldic devices, strangely conspicuous among which were ropes twisted in a great variety of nooses. Upon the car was a bier, covered with flame-coloured velvet, under which were horribly distinct the forms of two human beings, evidently, from their motionless attitude, dead.

So strange a spectacle necessarily attracted Le Beaufort's curiosity, and he accosted the leader of the party with a fearlessness which disarmed any suspicion he might otherwise have entertained, especially as he used a pass-word which he had acquired at Faenza—Cæsar Imperator; and in reply he learned that upon the hearse lay the corpses of Paolo Orsino and his father, the Duke of Gravina, who had been strangled by the Duke of Romagna's command, in the castle of La Pieve. With the purpose of terrifying young Fabio and his adherents into surrender and submission, by the spectacle of the punishment his relatives' treason had obtained, and to show to all the world the impartial and inflexible nature of his highness's justice, these corpses were thus solemnly and publicly escorted to Bracciano for interment, with visible signs of their painful and ignominious doom.

Sir Reginald could scarcely believe this tale, although the bravo assured him that he had done "the justice" with his own hands, until he raised the covering, and threw the blaze of a torch on the ghastly and horrible visages of the two Orsini, lying side by side in their daily garb, whose monstrous eyes, nearly forced from their sockets, and swollen flesh, direfully witnessed the horrible manner of their death. Paolo's teeth were firmly set in his tongue, and his dead eyes had a glare in the torchlight which seemed as if they rekindled for an instant in the horror-struck gaze of his friend. And no language, no eloquence, could equal the energy of that appeal for vengeance which the silent and mutilated carcass conveyed! But when Sir Reginald considered all the horrors of the fate his friend had undergone, for ever ignorant of his purposes of aid and revenge, perhaps deeming him a villain of the darkest dye, overwhelmed by every species of anguish, disappointed in his love, betrayed, crushed with the consciousness that he had caused the destruction of his father and of his friends—the vile and degrading manner of his death to a noble and a knight—the boldest assassin of all the group would have been affrighted to hear the oath of vengeance which, in his secret soul, Le Beaufort took.

Crossing himself in ratification of the vow, but as if merely in natural horror at the spectacle, Le Beaufort turned away, and, after a moment's thought, desired John of the Catacombs to inform the duke that he had

encountered a messenger from Faenza, in the arms *once worn by a Knight of St. John*, who sent his highness word that all went well there, and that only his presence in Rome was needful, where he would await him with the news, since he might not, for special reasons, attend him at his siege of Bracciano.

Le Beaufort arrived in Rome at too early an hour to present himself to the pontiff; and all the intelligence he learned in the meantime increased his wrath and apprehensions. The destruction of the whole race of the Orsini seemed determined: Cardinal Orsino had died suddenly in Sant'Angelo; and although his body was publicly exhibited by command of the pope, the belief that his death was caused by poison had infuriated the adherents of the unfortunate family into open riots. The Colonnas were astir in the southern Campagna of Rome, secretly aided by the Spaniards; and still more portentous was the re-appearance of the famous friar, Bruno Lanfranchi. He was reported to have a miraculous power of quitting the dungeons in which the Borgias had confined him, at his pleasure; which strange belief, aided by the mad fervour of his eloquence, and great sufferings, gathered around him the masses of the populace, to whom he preached some divine mission of his own, and declaimed and uttered fearful prophecies against the person and government of Alexander, with a violence which demonstrated a strange indifference or alarm in the pontiff, since he made no effort to repress the tumultuary assemblages which listened to these denunciations. Yet it was true that, at the moment, it was not expedient to hazard any commotion among the fierce and fanatic populace of Rome. The pontiff's own troops were principally absent in the Campagna, repressing the attempts of the Colonna; the siege of Bracciano and the defence of his new possessions absorbed Cæsar's force; and even the brigands of Rome, by their lawless outbreaks, demonstrated the weakness of the sway which should have restrained them.

At the earliest suitable hour Le Beaufort arrived at the Vatican; and immediately on announcing that he brought a message from the Duchess of Ferrara he was admitted into the presence of Alexander. Le Beaufort was not altogether surprised to find the pontiff with his hands clasped on his breast, and seemingly absorbed in profound and gloomy thought. But the entry of the messenger from his daughter somewhat brightened his expression.

“What are the news? How fares it with our young duchess? Wert thou present at her entry? What did the people say when they beheld the beauty of their prince's bride?” said Alexander, impetuously. “Alack! they have gained all that we have lost, and the light seems departed out of Rome. What said she? what remembrance sent she to our love?”

“Holy father, my news are for your private ear only,” said Sir Reginald; and the voice apparently struck the pontiff.

“Thou speakest from a sepulchre.—What ails thee, to keep the bars of thine helmet down?” he said “Or dost thou think we are to trust our person with a stranger?”

“I have here a letter to warrant so much,” replied Le Beaufort, kneeling and presenting Lucrezia's letter.

“We have not forgotten the poisoned package of Tomaso Tomasi; but yet it is our sweet one's hand, which nothing evil can imitate,” said Alexander, taking the epistle, on reading which he turned ashy pale, and hurriedly waved to his attendants to retire.

“And so thou art Cæsar's mad jest—the noble English paladin that hath

done us so much harm?" said the pontiff, hurriedly. " Speak boldly ; we esteem thy valour though we have suffered by it ; and this letter bids us trust thee, whatever marvels thou mayest deliver, whatever terrific tidings against the Duke of Romagna ! But, first where didst thou leave our niece? safe in her princely husband's arms?"

" Safe, holy father," replied the deeply melancholy tones of Le Beaufort. " Safe, beyond Ravenna—safe, out of Faenza."

" Safe, out of Faenza—her brother's mightiest fortress ! Dost thou, too, dare to echo in mine ears the lies for which the poets of Naples are damned?" said Alexander angrily.

" Your holiness may judge when you shall hear by what means—to execute what purpose of the Duke of Romagna, he made me his captain of Faenza!" replied Le Beaufort ; and with a calmness scarcely to be expected from him he related the conference at Sinigaglia, merely so far at first as related to the seizure of Lucrezia at Faenza.

Frequent exclamations of incredulity, anger, and amazement from Alexander interrupted the knight, but the former feelings gained the mastery.

" What frenzied falsehood is this?" he exclaimed. " It is of thine invention, to gratify thy hatred of the duke, and avenge the traitors, thy friends!—and yet 'tis Lucrezia's handwriting here ! I see how it is—what ails ye all—ye envy him this greatness which he hath achieved so toilsomely—so valiantly. The rebellious brood of the Orsini are nigh extinct, and we are made the arbiters of Italy—and ye come with this false tale ! Lucrezia's heart is no longer Borgian—but of Este ! She loves her sire no longer, or she would not tear my heart thus with these perjuries ! Begone from my presence, slanderer—or rather thou shalt to Santangelo, to abide my son's just vengeance on thy calumnies."

" This sign perchance may protect me ; if not, let him prove me false, his body against mine, and I am content," replied the English knight.

" It is indeed her ring," said the pontiff, relapsing from his angry tone. " It is her ring—which lightly she would not have parted withal. But how—if thy legend hath but the shadow of truth in it—how is Lucrezia in Ferrara, and how art thou here ? "

" They meant me to be the assassin of her noble husband, thence to murder her name, and give a pretext for mine own destruction when the time was ripe ; and therefore I boast no merit in the share I had in foiling the plot, signor," replied Le Beaufort ; and with unruffled firmness he continued his story, and it seemed as if some direful spell compelled the pontiff to listen in utter and aghast silence.

" It is not true ; it cannot be true ; it shall not be true!" he exclaimed at length, clenching his hands and looking upward, as if imploring of the heavens to overthrow even the laws of moral evidence on his behalf, in the excess of his anguish.

" Read then these intercepted tidings from Cæsar's emissary—death aided me to win this testimony!" said Sir Reginald, producing Monsignor d'Enna's scroll, still splashed with the blood of Zeid.

" What if it all be true ! It is thy gloss that lies!" said the pontiff with sudden fury, after a long despairing examination of this irresistible proof. " The Duke of Romagna is jealous of our favour—not of his sister's love—and devised an expedient to stop her on her way, for which thou at least shouldst not have been ungrateful!"

" Your holiness notes the conclusions of this scroll, which promises the

duke's forces from Romagna to march on Rome?" continued the inexorable avenger. "Wherefore they come you have yet to learn!"

"In truth the Duchess of Ferrara speaks of some treason plotted against us—a revelation from thee—ay, offers me, forsooth, her lord's aid against her brother! She queens it something too fast," said Alexander, in a broken and confused tone. "The Holy See, in our person, is not yet at that pass to need the good favour of a Lombard duke."

Totally unshaken by the anguish he inflicted, Le Beaufort resumed his narrative by reciting the corollary of the plot of Faenza, which Cæsar was undoubtedly urging to fulfilment in Rome, and which included, probably, the dethronement of the pontiff—certainly his deprivation of all real power.

"I am ill, good knight!—air! give me air, or my heart—air!" interrupted Alexander, rising and staggering dizzily a few paces; but ere Sir Reginald could offer his support he had resumed his firmness, and turned with fierceness on the messenger. "It is false! it must be false! For if Cæsar plotted this treason against ourself, wherefore should he deprive himself of the support so great an alliance yields!"

"For the same reason that he murdered his brother, Francesco!" replied Le Beaufort; and his eyes met Alexander's half-frenzied glare with a meaning in them which in a manner paralyzed him.

"Francesco!—murdered!" repeated the pontiff, and a dark sweat burst forth on his visage, and he leaned for a moment the whole weight of his massive person on the knight.

"This is nothing—only that we grow old," he said, rallying with a mighty effort. "My sight vanished for an instant—very naturally, very naturally—Where didst thou leave my child! where is my Lucrezia?—Alas! I am dying, and she will think her tidings killed me;—say 'twas not so, on your life, good knight!—But yet this at least—Francesco!—by his hand!—this is not true; 'tis false!"

"Remembers not your paternity the mad Jewess of the Ghetto?" replied Le Beaufort.

"This indeed were a meet punishment for me—a doom more hideous than to toss for ever in the eternal flames!" groaned Alexander. "But that this fear at least is all unfounded, thyself shalt learn." And touching a silver bell fastened to his footstool, he commanded an attendant who appeared to re-admit the Dominican friar in the antechamber.

"Retire into the shadow of yonder canopy—and thou wilt not be observed, for he who comes is dull of apprehension, and will not note your presence," said Alexander, with feverish eagerness and wildness.

Le Beaufort obeyed, and almost instantly the burly form of *Fra Biccocco* was kneeling at the pontiff's feet.

"Be not afraid!—so great a service performed, as well as promised, may well cancel the wild ravings of one who hath received some harshness at our hands, and but lately escaped from our dungeons," said Alexander. "Thy master, true to his obligation, will not reveal what hath been confided to him in confession; but yet will reveal to us the murderer of the Duke of Gandia, by a means of his own?"

"If the Jewish convertite be permitted to attend at the great junket to-night, where the murderer will be, most venerable holy lord and father," replied *Fra Biccocco*, notwithstanding his heretic training quaking with awe.

"The feast in the vineyard of Adrian di Corneto, on the Vatican!—But

he knows not that the Duke of Romagna will be there, from his siege?" said Alexander, very eagerly.

"Brother Bruno bade me implore your amplitude to send for him to share in the joy of the discovery—which after what folks say—but I am dumb except on what I was sent to say."

"It is very well.—Go then and reply that if Fra Bruno fulfils his word—his cowl is changed to a scarlet hat," said Alexander.

"Fra Bruno, then, most celsitude, desires that your grandeur will be pleased to send him a summons to your presence, when he is baptizing the Jewess before all the people, in the square of St. Peter, this sunset; and to send with it a force sufficient to excuse his obedience to the populace, and commanded by one in whom you can trust against all opposers—for the murderer is a man of might."

The pontiff nodded implicit approval and assent.

"And further—dreading the power of those he shall deliver to your vengeance, and in due regard to his own safety, my brother, holy Bruno, the second of that beatified glorification—bade me crave, as an assurance of your protection the golden box which your paternity wears ever in your bosom."

"The most blessed Host!—which as long as I wore an astronomer foretold to me, I should not die!" replied Alexander. "But here it is—bid him keep it till he demands his own ransom of me."

Fra Biccocco took the chain and little box with great reverence, kissing it devoutly; and the gesture of the pontiff dismissed him, for he retired with many reverences.

"Thou hast heard!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as Le Beaufort reappeared.

"And this proffer comes from Friar Bruno?" said Le Beaufort, also joyfully, though at first he but confusedly remembered the strange stories concerning him which Don Alfonso had related.

"Even so," replied the pontiff, pleased mistakenly with this satisfaction. "And thereupon hear what resolution I have formed. Cæsar himself gives a feast of reconciliation with the new-made cardinals at eventide, albeit few of them are held to be his friends—in the vineyard of Cardinal Adrian, on the Vatican. To disprove which evil thought, and win him from his headstrong jealousies of his sister's fortune—for indeed it is no more—they shall concur with me to-day to make his ducal crown royal! King of Romagna we will make him, since heaven hath lodged in our hands the power to make and unmake all the sovereignties of earth, much more those of our own land and dominion. Fear nothing for thy safety, which we will care for as dearly as our own—and we mean this feast shall be one of universal reconciliation. Thou shalt aid in the good work, for thou shalt be the messenger we will send for the friar and his Jewish convert; and thou shalt witness all things, and return with brighter tidings to our child, and news that we are on our way to see her on her throne in Ferrara—bringing with us matters to make an old man welcome."

Le Beaufort bent in submission, and but that he remembered the visages of the Orsini, he could have shared in the agony of grief and tenderness which overcame the strong heart of Alexander—when turning away he covered his face in a passion of silent grief!

CHAPTER LIV.

“ The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
 And like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a wreck behind! ” SHAKSPERE.

Nearly at the hour when Le Beaufort met the funeral car of the Orsini, the figure of the Black Penitent glided out of a dungeon in which from time to time deep groans were audible, and passing a number of sentinels, finally vanished down the unfrequented gallery leading to the tomb of Adrian, in which Fiamma had held her incantation. No inquiry or challenge was addressed to the Black Penitent, according to the commands of the castellan, which authorized his entry or egress at pleasure; and the general fear entertained of a being who was looked upon as some fiendish familiar of Caesar, or at best as a professor of the black art in his service, prevented any idle curiosity.

Descending into the vault we have formerly described, by the spiral pillar, Dom Sabbat immediately lighted a torch, and took a deliberate survey of the chamber. The first object on which his light gleamed was the figure of a woman, chained by a ring to the wall, and couched on a bed of straw, so white and motionless, that but for the apathetic stare which she fixed on the intruder it might have been thought that a marble statue lay there.

“ Tric-troc!—Fiamma! the hour of vengeance is at hand,” said Dom Sabbat. “ Notte is perishing, and the thick agonies would but let her tell me that thou hast seen where the poisoned wines are concealed. Speak, where is it? ”

Without replying by a single word the prisoner raised her thin white hand and pointed to one of the archways, which the sage immediately entered, and made his way to a circular excavation which seemed used as a wine-cellar, for snow was piled around, in a heap of which lay glistening a number of bottles of scarlet crystal, finely cut, and sealed with a rich silver ornament. Others of exactly similar make and colour, with the difference that they were sealed with lead, and fewer in number, lay at some distance from this heap. Approaching the former, Dom Sabbat took an instrument from his pouch which seemed contrived for the purpose, and deliberately wrenching out all the corks, without in the least injuring their fine seals. Muttering “ tric-troc ” in a strange manner many times to himself, the sage then drew an exactly similar number of the leaden corks, transferring one of the more precious ornament to each as he proceeded; and when he had completed the whole number, he carefully replaced all in the exact forms in which they had lain in the snow, and retired.

“ Fiamma! ” he said, as he returned, and again the figure raised itself mechanically and listened. “ I did hear Morta tell thy unkindly slow murderer that thou alone of all her disciples knowest the antidote to this poison, the subtle cantarelle;—thou wilt not betray it? ”

Fiamma laughed, though soundlessly, and covered her eyes with her hand as if the light troubled them; and with a profound sigh, and extinguishing his torch, the magus left the dungeon, murmuring “ Thou

shouldst at least have had sense spared thee to know thyself avenged—to have witnessed thy murderer's agony and doom!"

Winding to the summit of the stairs, it seemed to the sage when he reached it that something like a shriek sounded from below; but he dared not pause to satisfy himself, and continued his retreat.

The noon of that memorable day arrived, and the cannon of Santangelo announced a visit from the general of the church, whose vigilance made him pay his first visit to the fortress.

The castellan was of course in immediate attendance on his lord, who listened to his reports with profound attention and interest, and whose countenance betrayed, against its wont, much inward anxiety and troubled working of the mind.

"Fool!—I pray your pardon, and doff my cap to ask it, Migueloto; but it stirs me to hear thee call this man saint, when thou seest that he can work no miracles without thy connivance," he said, at length interrupting the castellan. "We have no time for these long pratings, for every instant that sweeps past heralds destiny! But the friar no longer doubts the efficacy of our miracle draught, since he was with the hags in their agony?"

"They linger still—yet but that they are both of meagre and sparing diet, and of so suspicious a turn, they had not outlived the half hour they give to those who drink of it, in pains so sharp," said Migueloto. "I told them their breakfast was from mine own table, pleasantly adding that they should not eat another in Santangelo. And yet Morta smacked her lips at the first taste, and looked snakily at me. And now to hear how they rave and blaspheme! how they promise me all their accumulated treasures in the Ghetto (which shall be mine at a cheaper rate) if I will yield them the materials for an antidote. But more than their own doom, methinks, it troubles them to hear of their grandchild's conversion and salvation."

"I should rejoice in this—for this is justice, and to serve our own turns by fair means should surely be pleasing, even but for the newness," said Cæsar. "And yet—I know not why—why should my spirit droop thus, that was ever so clear and mounting on an enterprise!—and this is the greatest of my life, the end, the completion, the crown of all;—and all goes well! The Orsini are terror-struck, and busied in burying their dead; and though Fabio be obstinate, his fiercest adherents treat secretly of a surrender, which I will only not accept because I will not leave Bracciano but for Rome! And when this tumult surges up, how can the old sire deny it, albeit he hath promised his dearest chuckling as much, who means still to govern us all from Ferrara! Best news are from Faenza—for Lucrezia falls into the snare, and my last messenger brings me tidings of a plot into which both my enemies must fall—the beloved Alfonso himself—the belovèd English thickskull—nay, has fallen, or what meant that message which honest John brought me, summoning me to Rome, from one whom he met at Bracciano? A dark stranger, and beside the carcases of the Orsini! Doubtless he will be here anon, since the ordnance has roared my arrival to the city so deafeningly."

"But that is strange, my lord. Why went he not with his news to Bracciano?" said Migueloto.

"That I shall learn, too; but I doubt no he is sent by Monsignor d'Enna to give the colouring I desired to Lucrezia's delay in Faenza, or to relate the catastrophe; and to have called at Bracciano would not render his

tidings more authentic," replied the duke. "Yet it is something strange—so peremptory a summons, and to me! I must have a good apology for boldness and irreverence like this. And unless he wore the weeds of a black knight to betoken that Alfonso needed his disguises no longer, wherefore in array so ominous?"

"And yet, my lord, were it not too late—omens are not to be despised! I had a fearful dream last night," said Don Migueloto; and observing that Cæsar looked at him with some attention, he continued—"Methought I was at high mass in the old church of our township, near Murviedro, and went to kneel among some children, who were cracking nuts instead of listening to their prayers, intending to reprove them. But they looked at me with such a smiling scorn and loathing that my tongue became too dry for utterance. And while I was striving to cry at least *Jesu preeavi!* I heard a strange stir, and saw the people pressing to the doors, as if to see some strange matter without—and for the most part they were men whom I have known, such as John of the Catacombs and mine own soldiery. But suddenly the doors of the church flew open of their own accord, and in rushed a mighty giant, raging mad, with a club in his hand as broad as a man's girth; and I knew it was his holiness the pope, and he dashed out brains on every side as if men's skulls were eggshells, yelling 'My son, my son! where are the murderers of my son?' And then I remembered the duke—your brother, and hid myself in very agony under the huge tomb of the Aguilars, lords of our village; and then methought the stones rolled away that prop it, and the whole crushing weight was upon my breast; and in the struggle of my doom I awoke!"

"If dreams could fright me, castellain, thy dull fancy shapes none so terrible as those that visit my couch," replied Cæsar, not altogether undisturbed. "The oracle is only—that if thou stumblest on an ill end thou canst not say it chanced without a warning. But I tell thee 'tis too late, though the fiend rose beneath our feet to warn us back!—Where is the monk?"

"I hear him even now, signor, with his tric-troc. His lonely imprisonment has something touched his wits—but for the most part it happens so; and even Fiamma bath now a strange way of looking at one, and asks how time goes by the obelisk in the market-place, which is older than Rome itself, they say," replied the castellain.

"Tric-troc! tric-troc!—how strangely the world whirls round, and takes no rest," said Fra Bruno, muttering to himself as he entered the chamber; but changing his perturbed and wild expression into one of self-possession and calm as he recognised Cæsar. "Signor, the Jewesses are in a fearful agony—passing away all unrepented and unab-solved."

"Let them perish!—it is even justice!" said Cæsar.

"The Duke of Romagna says so, and it is an oracle," said Fra Bruno, with a momentary expression in his eyes which struck the suspicious Borgia.

"Call it vengeance, and not justice, if thou wilt; and look, not to incur the like: thy fellow-sorceress still lives to tell men what thou art, if thou angerest me," he said. "But no. I trust in thee—and thou shalt be our only miracle-worker. Despite Migueloto's proclamation, and bolts, and bars, and Jewish prayers, most supernaturally shalt thou keep thy word with the populace, and appear in the square of St. Peter with thy convertite! Thy citation shall drag the bride of Ferrara from her blood-stained

pastimes in Faenza, to answer it! Thou shalt appear before the pontiff to refute those Jews that will have it Miriam is mad;—and thou shalt refute them with miracles, when thy denunciation brings down destruction, sudden as lightning, on the princes of the church—the simonists named in this schedule. And if, meanwhile, the surrender of Miriam to the Jews, by overruling commands, stirs the whole Christian populace in uproar—if the brigands increase it by lawless doings to affright all honest men—if Colonnas and Orsini burst into open rebellion, and the mob recognise thy miraculous errand—certes, Alexander can find no other refuge than my fortress—no rescue but the swords of my host. And with him in Santangelo, and them in Rome—I am emperor, and thou art saint—and Lucrezia—”

“What is she?” said the Dominican, filling up the sudden pause which his patron made.

“She!—What can she be, overwhelmed with the dire report which must accompany her from Faenza, and the destruction of both her loving mallards?” said Cæsar, his eye flashing upon Fra Bruno, who replied, in a cold and untroubled tone, “A nun of the severest order?”

“Ay, to match the better with thee,” replied Cæsar, laughing darkly. “Desperate and guilt-lost, what else can she be? Thou dost not think that we will kneel to her to implore her empress it with us in Rome, or aid thee in thy counsels of reform against her most dear sire?”

“And on the citation of my nameless beggars Monsignor d’Enna shall have order to send her to Rome?—A miracle indeed!” said Fra Bruno, with a smile of profound satisfaction.

“Ferrara will not interfere to prevent it, I tell thee, nor whatever farther falls excite much marvel,” replied the duke. “And now let us each to our tasks. I will trust in none to give instructions to the butler and his cupbearers but myself. Our sire is a Spanish drinker, but the weather is hot. Yet, Migueloto, six bottles of the same quality with that wine miraculous may serve our turn; and we two will content us with those sealed with lead, albeit not so honourable nor special as those marked with the silver crowns intended for our guests!”

“Tis impossible suspicion should arise, my lord,” replied Migueloto.

“But there must be some signal to the butler, when he is to serve from this priceless bin to our expectant well-wishers,” said Cæsar, thoughtfully. “The word shall be, that I would he should also send me a salver of peaches; they shall be of the number of the condemned, and gathered by mine own hand. And now to thy preparations also, friar; for the moments hurry past.”

Fra Bruno gave a slight start, as if he had been lost in meditation; but he immediately complied, and with a bend retired.

“The time shall yet come—when thy work is done—that I will learn wherefore thou hast so specially worked on me,” said Cæsar, following him with a long unquiet gaze. “Migueloto, see that all be prepared; and if the dark stranger from Faenza comes hither, send him instantly to me at my palace.”

With these words the ducal conspirator parted from his accomplice for a time, and each hastened to fulfil some important task connected with the grand blow meditated.

The hours passed on rapidly laden with destiny as they might be, and the festive company invited to the feast in the Vatican vineyard were fast inundating its green arcades hung with thick bunches of the ripe grape.

Tidings were rife of an extraordinary assemblage of the people in the square of St. Peter, to witness the baptism of a Jewess by their new saint; but no one of the invited dared to stay away, lest his absence should be construed into a mark of disaffection.

The pontifical court was assembled in a natural saloon, formed of elms united by vine-suckers: and thither the pontiff and the Duke of Romagna, attended by a magnificent group of cardinals and nobles, arrived. It was noticed, principally for the darkness of his garb, and wearing his vizor closed, that a Knight of St. John was among the pontiff's retinue.

But the agitated look of the pontiff excited and absorbed the general attention, and his pallor could scarcely be accounted for even by the excessive heat, which was but just beginning to yield to the freshening of the evening breeze. Cæsar also wore an aspect of inward perturbation, more especially when his eye fell upon the Knight of St. John; but the inquiry in it was answered by a significant nod which wonderfully reassured and inspirited him; so that, until he suddenly remembered that he had another part to play, his manner had in it something of a wild gaiety.

Alexander sat for some minnites in deep silence, listening apparently to the compliments which Cæsar addressed to the new cardinals, as Burciardo presented them with his usual formal state and set forms of speech.

“The most reverend Giovanni Castellar Valentino, Archbishop of Trani; Francesco Remolino, of Lerida, Ambassador of the Catholic kings; Francesco Loderini, Bishop of Volterra; Melchior Copis, of Germania, Bishop of Brixen; Niccolò Fiesco, Bishop of Frejus; Francesco de Sprate, Spaniard, Bishop of Leon; Adriano Castellense da Corneto, Bishop, Clerk of the Chamber, Treasurer General, and Secretary of Briefs; Francesco Iloris Valentino, Bishop of Elva, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Prosecretary of the holiness of our lord the pope; Jacomo Casanuova also Valentino, Prothonotary and Secret Chamberlain of his holiness;” were all duly announced, and received Cæsar’s courteous and gracious greetings.

“We miss the Cardinal of Modena, as we hear the Datary hath become?—Alack, how we forget ourselves—the good man is gone!” said Cæsar, as the last of the scarlet-robed dignitaries paid his homage. “But the church is indeed enriched in many senses with additions so illustrious—all chosen indeed by heavenly inspiration; for what other was there in the matter, though we cannot boast that we discern one among you of those whom we ardently recommended in our prayers to such an honour! Yet, albeit we had no part in your elevations, most reverend lords, we heartily rejoice in it, and have given this feast to show our satisfaction.”

“Nephew,—and to prove that your satisfaction is no less politic and just than generous, hear us,” said Alexander. “The Sacred College, to show that any report of ill-affection to your person, or ignorance of your merits, wronged all equally, have unanimously recommended to us a measure to which we have given our consent, touched by our knowledge of your great and hitherto but meanly recompensed deservings, whereby we have resolved to change your ducal title to that of sovereignty, and create you King of Romagna!”

Cæsar himself was staggered for several instants: but regaining his resolution, he replied with strangely brief and cold thanks—

"Romagna! We fear it will become a sound which even a kingly addition cannot make pleasant in our ear," he said. "Is it by your paternity's command that the Duchess of Ferrara delays in Faenza?"

"Dost thou fear the lady will take thy city from thee, Cæsar?" said the pontiff with a start.

"Nay—but, signor, for his valour I had made Sir Reginald le Beaufort my captain of Faenza; and there are reasons, as your paternity may remember, wherefore the Duchess of Ferrara should not tarry where he is master. And—for I must be bold—I would beseech you send her word to hasten on her journey, lest report should wrong us all."

"Some wine! I am faint at heart! Yet it is true, Cæsar—we have heard of this! The ravages of the Vitelli affright her; but her lord is with her now, and will give her courage," said Alexander, with a strong shudder, which Caesar remarked not without satisfaction.

"Nay, then, let us all pledge each other in a loving quaff," said the duke. "In Urbino I found some precious stores, whereof I mean to feast understanding palates, though I play the niggard ever after. Bid Messer Antonio send me of the scarlet flasks, cupbearer; and with it the *salver of peaches* which I gathered myself from Donna Lucrezia's favourite wall."

Don Migueloto at this instant made his appearance from among a crowd of the courtiers; and, stepping reverently towards the pontiff, knelt before him, and seemed to await permission to speak, which Caesar immediately gave, by exclaiming, "What ails thee, castellain? what would thy twittering visage say?"

"Signor, the friar who escaped from Santangelo, and who has already excited so many tumults, is now engaged, in defiance of my prohibition, in baptizing a Jewess in the square of St. Peter, and delivering a seditious harangue to the populae," replied the Catalan. Moreover, the woman is mad, and her kindred declare that 'tis done but to secure an inheritance to the Dominicans, which the wealthiest and most answerable of her tribe await without to certify."

"Go, give the Jewess to her friends, and seize the monk in his holiness's name! These seditions grow dangerous," said Caesar, imperiously.

"Nay, we will have the monk and his convert both before us. Let the Jews have audience, and we will ourself judge whether she be sane, or as mad as some of us that go about unshackled," said Alexander, with sudden impetuosity.

"Holy father, what needs it, when we have learned that it is the mad wench that played such strange gambols of discourse to you in the jubilee time?" said Caesar, somewhat alarmedly.

"Thus it shall be, or we will learn who is more the master in Rome!" said Alexander, with increasing severity; and then, with a profound and gloomy sigh, he looked round to Sir Reginald, and said, "Knight, we may depend on thee. Take the Swiss; you have our command."

"It may arouse some sudden commotion, which we have no strength in Rome to resist," said Caesar; "specially if the Jewess be seized, as it will seem, to be delivered to the vengeance of her tribe."

"On that this knight may exercise some discretion; he hath the quality, and needs it," said the pontiff with another sigh, which Caesar interpreted favourably; more especially as the messenger from Faenza answered his inquisitive gaze with a deep bend; and his attention was now attracted by the arrival of the chief butler, with his retinue of cupbearers, and the precious wines in the scarlet crystal. Sir Reginald instantly made his

exit from the retinue, and Cæsar watched the butler so anxiously as he opened the bottles, that although the castellan kept his eye fixed on him for some signal, it was not until he had observed that his own goblet, and Alexander's, and that of the Cardinal Adrian di Corneto, whom for some reason he chose to preserve, were filled from the bottles sealed with lead, and all the others from those of silver, that he raised his head.

"The times are dangerous, and it is good we be prepared for worse," he then said. "Migueloto, post my guard round the vineyard, to keep the rabble from following their prophet ringleader in; and have the gates of Santangelo opened, and your forces arrayed, that we may at least lodge the person of his holiness in safety if any disorder should arise."

Alexander's agitation visibly increased; but the apparent submission to the order to admit Miriam with the monk somewhat cleared the clouds from his brow; and he again, and with many added encomiums, declared his purpose of raising Cæsar to the sovereign dignity, by desiring all present to drink to the health of the King of Romagna. Le Beaufort had disappeared almost the instant he received the command, and Don Migueloto followed with equal rapidity; so that the guards with which the former hastened on his commission were promptly replaced by the fierce and well-appointed soldiery of the Borgia.

Cæsar now deigned for the first time to express some gratitude, though he laughingly complained that he was thus debarred from sharing the rich draught. But when the assemblage arose, and each of the newly made cardinals, holding his full goblet in his hand, with emulous zeal awaited the signal from the pontiff to drain it, Cæsar's countenance shone with a brilliant expression of joy and eagerness and fearful mirth which produced a very unanswering effect on the pontiff. His nervy hand trembled as he raised his goblet, and after a momentary hesitation he set it down, thrust his hand into the breast of his robe, and exclaimed, "We have left it in our chamber.—Monsignor Caraffa, hasten to the palace, and bring us our reliquary.—Yet, no, no, we had forgotten—ourself parted with it to one in assurance of safeguard," he continued, but not in time to prevent the ready zeal of the young bishop whom he had addressed. Then somewhat confusedly glancing around, he raised the goblet with an eager snatch, and without giving the toast, drained it.

"Signor, you have forgotten the health of—the King of Romagna," said Cæsar, smiling, but looking disappointedly at the guests—who stared at one another and did not drink.

"'Tis true!—a negligence easily repaired this burning noon.—Refill!" replied the pontiff, hurriedly. "We had forgotten—not forgotten—but, we know not how, our thoughts were wandering abroad, for it scarcely seems we are at home since we miss that sunshine which hath departed from among us for ever!—Our age grows very lonely.—But it will teach us henceforth not to make gaps in the hearths of others. Mercy becomes old age, and henceforth we mean to listen rather to her gentle teachings than to the stern clamour of a justice too exact;—to the health of the King of Romagna!"

Again the pontiff drained the goblet, and this time he was imitated by the whole court—to the unbounded satisfaction of Cæsar, whose eyes, fit with malicious triumph, rapidly darted from cup to cup, to be certain that none had shunned the doom to which he had dedicated them. But all had with emulous zeal drained to the last drops.

Lurid with his dire inward joy, Cæsar then arose to return the pledge,

and drink the health of the new cardinals; in which Alexander, hoping to quell the agitation which grew upon his frame with every moment of expectation, again joined. Cæsar drained his ample goblet so heartily that he even tilted it, and clinked the gold, to show his new friends the zeal with which he had returned their love; and willing to make certain of his victims, immediately turned to the chief butler, who had arrived with a salver of peaches, and commanded that the goblets should again be filled from his precious stores, to drink to the safe and *speedy* progress of the Duchess of Ferrara to her new capital.

Alexander very eagerly joined in this toast; and unconsciously, in the tumult of his inward thoughts, and probably for the first time since his elevation to the pontifical dignity, in public, he styled Lucrezia his beloved daughter, the King of Romagna's sister.

The cardinals looked at one another somewhat scandalized, and Cæsar exclaimed, with a covert and strange sneer in his tone, “Nay—for none can deny his holiness hath ever treated my sister as his daughter—beloved indeed!”

Alexander's eye fell for an instant with an indescribable and most terrific expression on the duke, and all the marble placidness of his visage could scarcely turn the darting lightning of that fierce, inquiring glance. The pontiff then turned away, and glanced in the direction whence the monk was to be expected—who now appeared, walking between two Swiss soldiers, without Miriam or any other company but that of his brother Dominican, Fra Biccucco.

All attention was immediately concentrated on the friar; and when he halted before the magnificent festal groups, and drew himself to his full height without any sign of reverence or respect for the august presence in which he stood, his visage perfectly bloodless but instinct with terrible though silent passion—an awe sunk upon the assemblage like that which falls upon the souls of men when a tempest gathers and pauses ere it bursts.

The Duke of Romagna was the only one untroubled by this gloomy guest's arrival, if guest he might be called; he gave the monk a nod, with a significant glance at the stained goblets, which he comprehended, for a fearful smile lighted his worn and gloomy features.

“Where is thy convert, monk?—We bade her come with thee to our presence, that we might adjudge between thee and the Jews, who declare her mad,” said Alexander.

“She is detained with them and my sequence of believers, at the gates, with the reviling Jews, by the guard of the Duke of Romagna,” replied the Dominican, sedately. “The black knight whom your holiness sent craves your direct command to admit her, or permission to break a way through the opposers.”

“Burciardo, go and command in our name, and on peril of the denier's head, that none refuse admittance to the Knight of St. John, the Jews, and Miriam—ourselves sit here in judgment!” said Alexander, with a violence and impetuosity which drowned the words in which Cæsar began to utter a peremptory refusal, and which sent the Dean of Strasburgh with unwonted and undignified despatch on his errand.

“Be it even so.—I care not,” said Cæsar, with an indifference contradicted by the quiver in his eyes. “I meddle not with the convert, though they say she is fair for a Jewess.—But, monk, since I am Gonfalonier of Rome, I may presume to question thee what doctrines these are

thou preachest, stirring the people with rebellious and heretic misbeliefs?"

"My doctrines, Gonfalonier, are matters beyond your province. The church alone hath the power to decide on them," replied the monk, calmly.

"Let me hear them, then—I am the church," said Alexander, graciously, but still much agitated. "Let me hear thy projects, for if they be good and wholesome I will myself aid in them to the uttermost—for indeed we feel that we have delayed the work too long."

"My projects are, then—to root out the simony of Roderic Borgia, falsely styled Pope Alexander the Sixth!—which hath shaken the pillars of the faith in all men's minds, and made the very heavens waver above our heads, as doubting whether to fall and crush earth back into chaos!—To hurl destruction on him and all his accursed brood!—To cleanse the church of their defilements, and bring back the wandering generations of mankind to her pale; to demonstrate the justice of heaven in the sudden, terrific, and utter downfall of the flagitious race who have dared to steal even the lightnings of God to ravage his earth!" replied the Dominican.

"He is mad—most mad!" said Alexander, after a long pause of profound astonishment. "And as a man, let him rave unchastised."

"He hath a prophet's boldness, and perchance his mission," said Cæsar, not altogether affecting the awe which his low tone denoted. "And look how all the steeps of the Vatican are blackening with his mob! I trust that we shall at least have the way open to Santangelo, that we may have time given us to bring our answers to this miracle-worker from Bracciano."

"It reminds me well, Cæsar. I did intend to visit your dungeons of Santangelo, to do some acts of grace and mercy there. Among the rest, I promised Lucrezia to learn whether Fiamma Colonna is there as thy prisoner, or thy guest," said Alexander with sternness, and evidently startled.

"Your son-in-law of Ferrara hath generously taken care of her, signor!—since Capua, we have not seen nor heard aught of her fate," replied Cæsar betraying some slight alarm. "Our Lady grant she make no mischief in Ferrara! But thou, monk, shouldst have better assurances than visions to support thee in so dangerous a task as this which thou announcest."

"This very night had I one, in which I will confide rather than in the spears of ten thousand!" replied Fra Bruno. "Methought I beheld a putrid carcass breed a snake, which came forth and stung the murderer, and straight he swelled and burst; and it was given to me to crush the reptile even with mine unsandalled feet, and the carcass resumed its life, and became lovely and fragrant as one whom ye have all seen—and shall see no more!"

"But the ancient prophets showed visible signs of their divine commission; and where are thine?" replied Cæsar, mockingly, but with a look which the friar understood, and returned with one of mingled loathing and triumph.

"What sign can be more manifest," he returned, "than that Cæsar Borgia—the fratricide more cruel than Cain! the tyrant more remorseless than Nero! the infidel more unbelieving than Judas!—should project the reformation of the church? Were it more if these ruins which strew the wastes of the seven hills were suddenly to rise again in all their magnificence?"

"Monk—though thou art mad there is a malice in thy ravings which may distinguish thee from thy fellow maniacs!" said Cæsar, kindling with the passions which this address was so likely to rouse.

"I appeal to your holy sire's protection—promised by this sign," returned the monk, with a bitter smile, and producing Alexander's golden box of the Eucharist.

"It is so," said the pontiff, with a fathomless gloom in his tones. "Cæsar, since thou deemest the monk a prophet honour him as such."

"But ye demand my proofs," continued the Dominican hurriedly "and I answer—Am I not here at liberty? Have I not compelled the stones of Santangelo to yield up my convertite? Yea, and I have summoned, Alexander, thy pernicious daughter from her adulteries in Faenza—and she shall obey."

"Sacrilegious traitor! what wouldest thou say?—of what adulteries dost thou accuse our daughter?" shouted Alexander, glaring from the monk to his now evident accomplice.

"Simonist! although thou didst unlawfully and irreligiously dissolve the betrothal of thy daughter to the son of him who saved thy life, and whom the pride of thy ill-gotten empire taught thee to disdain, it is he who calls the wife of Alfonso of Ferrara adulteress! the dallier with Reginald le Beaufort, adulteress!" returned the friar, with equal vehemence. "It is he who even by the means of the detested monster, thy son, brings her back to Rome—there to exhibit before all the world the greatest miracle of all—by resigning her to the church whose glory she has darkened so long, and which that act shall restore to tenfold splendour!"

"And where is he, this wondrous first husband of Lucrezia? Idiot, what ravest thou?" exclaimed Cæsar, convulsively clutching his dagger, and shrinking from the fierce gaze which his sire now turned upon him.

"He is here!—I!—for I am Bernard of Lanfranc, whom the mean pride and tyranny of Rodrigo Borgia deprived of his betrothed wife, and forced into a cloister!" returned the Dominican.

"If thou art Bernard of Lanfranc, why hast thou hidden thyself so long from my gratitude, which would only have fallen short of the absurd sacrifice of my child to thy years and student gloom?" said Alexander, with amazement. "I know not that I ever saw thee but once—a score of years are gone—a pallid student in Salamanca. All that relates to thy advancement I will perform; but rave not of Lucrezia, for I tell thee thy summons will reach Faenza too late, and here comes one who brought us the joyful intelligence of her escape from a prodigious snare—of her safe reunion with her husband, Alfonso of Ferrara, and arrival in his strong capital; where, if an old man's blessing may avail, long may they flourish in each other's love, and their children's children repeat her beauty and his princely virtues to all posterity. Welcome him, Cæsar, it is your captain of Faenza, Sir Reginald le Beaufort!"

At this moment Le Beaufort entered the leafy saloon, accompanied by Burciardo and the neophyte, Miriam, who wore a long white linen hood and garments, and was intently watching a butterfly which in a singular manner flew before them, fluttering in the hot air. Hearing the pontiff's words, Sir Reginald instantly raised his vizor, and stood revealed to the amazed and fear-struck eyes of Cæsar.

But the effect upon the Dominican was still more powerful, and for some time he glared vacantly at the young knight, as if he had received some blow which had stunned memory and consciousness.

"Look yonder, how it wears his pretty coat—purple velvet, powdered with gold!" exclaimed the young Jewess, vacantly watching the sportive movements of the butterfly, which flew over the table towards the pontiff.

"At least—but I will have vengeance!" said the monk, recovering from his shock, and clutching his convertite, he drew her violently forward, and tore off her veil. "Miriam, this is the reward I promised thee for thy faith—vengeance on the murderer of thy Francesco! Look round and tell us which is he!"

There was a short pause of terrific and breathless silence, during which Miriam glanced with frantic eagerness around the groups, until her eye fell on the visage of Cæsar, now flaming with demoniac passions and fear—and then with a shriek which seemed as if it pierced to the lofty heavens above, she pointed at him. "He is there—he is there! Oh, give me justice, judge, and slay the murderer of Francesco!"

And she flew with astonishing swiftness to Alexander's chair, and threw herself frantically at his feet.

Cæsar started up like a wild beast roused in his lair, and seemed preparing to spring upon the hapless Jewess, when Alexander himself arose, and with a countenance awful in its excess of anguish, exclaimed, "Receive my malediction, Cain!—Advance farther, and mine own hand—guards, level your spears."

Le Beaufort's sword instantly gleamed over the couchant figure of the Jewess.

"And now hear mine," said Fra Bruno, his eyes gleaming with supernatural and insane fierceness, his attitude that of a prophet of old denouncing woes. "Hear me, Rodrigo and Cæsar Borgia! Heaven is at last weary of your crimes—earth and heaven alike—and the hour of doom, and vengeance, and justice, and destruction, is at hand! Tyrants, oppressors, betrayers! within the hour I command ye both to render up your detestable souls to vengeance, cursed with assurance of each other's hatred and guilt; and on the answer to this summons do I stake my claims to be held as a prophet of God or a lying impostor of the fiend!"

"Indeed I am grievously held!—Parricide, hast thou poisoned my drink?" said Alexander, his colour changing to a strong livid tint; and, after a momentary struggle, and vacant grasping in the air, he staggered, and was supported back into his chair by Le Beaufort.

"My heart is on fire—but of this I am not guilty, Alexander! Hellish sorcerer, hast thou poisoned us?" said Cæsar, in whose own breast the direful potion had begun its work.

"Nay, signor, I but changed the leaden corks for silver ones; an honourable distinction due to your rank and merit," replied the monk, with a smile of unutterable meaning.

"Bear me away—I am dead—knight, to the Vatican—not to Santangelo, not to Santangelo!" groaned the pontiff; and with one last terrific glance at Cæsar he added, "This is justice!" and sank senseless in the arms of Le Beaufort and Burciardo.

"Some antidote! some antidote!—Notte and Morta!—A thousand crowns for either!—Bring them hither!" yelled Cæsar.

"My lord, they are, even as I left Santangelo, dead! Fly, fly, my lord!—Monsignor d'Euna has arrived with fearful news!" said Migueloto, who at this instant rushed in, and stared aghast at the dismal spectacle which he beheld. Miriam perceived him instantly, and with a shriek of terror darted from behind the pontiff's chair, where she had crouched,

and fled with the rapidity of a startled hare down one of the walks of the vineyard.

"Oh, there is no hope then!—All is lost!—The poison burns through my entrails!" said Cæsar, staggering and becoming pale as if already a corpse. "But vengeance! Seize the sorcerer, Migueloto—he has poisoned us! Father!—let him at least not deem that I have slaughtered him! Help! Fiamma! Oh, Fiamma! She—an antidote! Keep off those fiery forms! The dark one!—he in the glistering turban! Keep him off—he tears my heart out with his burning pincers! All those grisly faces! Flames, flames, flames!—And this is hell! Horror, horror, horror! Help, rescue, Fiamma!—Help!" And he, too, sank senseless to the ground.

In a wonderfully brief space it was known all over Rome that the pontiff lay in a dying state in the Vatican, and that the Duke of Romagna was conveyed, in a state of similar desperation, to Santangelo. The confusion and tumults which immediately arose threatened general ruin; and for some days the city was abandoned to every species of disorder and violence. The slender forces of the pope, under orders of Sir Reginald le Beaufort, limited their exertions to defending all the accesses to the Vatican, and the person of the dying pontiff. Alexander lingered during eight days of inconceivable agonies; and although closely attended by Le Beaufort during the whole period, and frequently recovering his memory and consciousness, not once did he pronounce the name of Lucrezia or Cæsar; and the only sign of remembrance of either which he gave was within a few minutes of his death, when, extending his hand to Le Beaufort, he desired him to draw a ring off it, and destroy it before his sight. But the convulsions which overtook him instantly compelled Le Beaufort to pause in executing the behest; and after the pontiff's death, when he was about to crush it, although he remembered that it was the ring he had borne from Lucrezia, Master Burciardo stopped him by showing how it contained a wondrously small but beautiful miniature of Lucrezia. It was not destroyed.

Meanwhile nothing was known with certainty of Cæsar's fate; but it was reported that he was still alive, and that a sorceress who had long been confined in Santangelo, by spells and the administration of marvellous remedies, such as sewing him up in the body of a bull ripped open alive, and plunging him into baths said to be of human blood, maintained him so against all the power of the poison he had swallowed. Meanwhile his bodily tortures seemed not to have diminished the vigour and activity of his mind; and the instant the death of the pope took place, his troops took possession of the Vatican, from which Le Beaufort but just effected his retreat in time, and Migueloto stripped the palace and treasury of Alexander of all its riches, jewels, plate, and gold, to a prodigious amount, which he transferred to Santangelo.

Absorbed in projects of revenge, and of assistance to the beleaguered Orsini in Bracciano, Le Beaufort sent intelligence of what had happened to all the cities and personages whom he thought likely to take advantage of the disasters of their tyrant, and distract the attention of his forces. The Colonnas accordingly hastened on Rome, assisted by a large Spanish force; Urbino, Pesaro, Camerino, Piombino, and the Vitelli, burst into

open revolt: the Malatestas rushed upon Rimini; the Baglioni, aided by two powerful nobles of the Orsini family, and Venetian succours, recovered Perugia, and advanced on Bracciano to raise the siege. But already this task was accomplished by the division of Cæsar's forces, rendered necessary by the universal outbreak, and to protect his person in Rome itself: and ere the rescuers reached Bracciano, Fabio Orsino, breathing destruction to the very name of Borgia, entered Rome with a powerful force.

Le Beaufort hastened to join the Orsini on their entry, and he went to the bridge of Santangelo to meet Fabio, while over the castle still waved the Borgian flag. And from the young chieftain he learned that Paolo Orsino had, in dying, solemnly commended his vengeance to Sir Reginald le Beaufort; and his last words implored that he would never return to his own land until he had avenged him by the destruction of the tyrant. Moved with the sight of the young orphan, and all the recollections of his ancient friendship, Le Beaufort—gnashing his teeth at the flag which flaunted defiance from the battlements of the castle—accepted the charge with an oath, which was echoed in an unanimous roar by the incensed clansmen around.

Meanwhile, though Le Beaufort had ordered the most diligent research, no tidings had been heard of Miriam; and the fate of Fra Bruno, who had been dragged a prisoner into Santangelo, could only be conjectured by the fact that Cæsar had attempted to quiet the tumult of the monk's partisans by accusing him of sorcery, on the evidence of Sultan Zemi's paramour, long believed an accomplice in the unholy art. But now, as the gloomy procession of the Avengers crossed the bridge of Santangelo, an old boatman shouted from the water below for assistance, and appeared slowly rowing to the shore with a drenched female corpse, partially covered with weeds and slime, stretched in his boat. The boatman was old Schiavone, and the corpse was that of Miriam; but how she came to her dismal fate, whether by her own act, or the violence of others, remains for ever a mystery. Yet those who were acquainted even with the outlines of the dismal story of the Jewess, heard not without emotion that her body was found almost in the very spot where formerly that of her unfortunate lover, the Duke of Gandia, was discovered.

The Orsini and Le Beaufort were determined on avenging themselves to the utmost on Cæsar, and to rest only satisfied with his utter destruction; but the great force with which he kept Santangelo and the Vatican, and the commands of the Sacred College, which had now assumed the government of the city, and laboured to clear it of all the contending parties during the election of a new pontiff, made the enterprise very difficult. Fabio, with the subtlety of his house, now endeavoured to stimulate the fanaticism of the populace to aid him in an attack by calling upon them to rescue the miraculous monk from Cæsar's hands; and the people were soon excited to the height which he desired, and clamoured for arms to assail Santangelo, when suddenly a counter move of the Borgia disconcerted the plan. It was announced that the sorcerer monk had himself demanded an ordeal by fire, to prove the truth of his mission, and the falsehood of the accusation against him; and that Cæsar had consented he should undergo it, in the presence of all the people, in the square of St. Peter.

The prospect of a spectacle so extraordinary, and of a visible miracle, excited the curiosity and fanaticism of the populace to a degree at which

it was in vain to contend with the impetus; but Fabio and Sir Reginald resolved to be present to take advantage of aught that might happen to stir the people, not without hope that the Dominican had only demanded the ordeal that he might throw himself upon the protection of his followers, and of the Borgia's enemies.

A great pile of faggots, interlaid with peat, and tow steeped in tar, straw, and other inflammable substances, was erected in the square of St. Peter; and on the day on which the deformed and bloated corpse of Alexander, with scarcely any honour or funeral pomp, was hurried to the sepulchre, an immense mass congregated to witness the experiment. Sir Reginald and Fabio, with a chosen party of horse, were grouped around the pile, ready to act as occasion might direct.

Surrounded by a potent body of Cæsar's guard from Santangelo, came the devoted monk, Don Migueloto himself walking beside him, with bare head, and much appearance of reverence. Fra Bruno's cowl was thrown back, and although his eyes were fixed on the ground, there was nothing in his steady walk and calm countenance to denote any real intention of undergoing so fearful an ordeal, until Fra Biccoco, breaking from the crowd, threw himself sobbing at his feet, and implored him to speak but the word, and the people would rescue him. Fabio Orsino shouted the same assurance, and instantly there arose a terrific uproar among the masses, which was silenced as if by magic when the friar waved his hand to claim attention, and spoke.

“Savonarola!” he exclaimed, and paused to satisfy himself that there was a silence—and a breathless one indeed reigned over the whole crowded mass—“Savonarola failed in the ordeal which he invoked, for his heart was broken by the ingratitude of the people whom he had saved, and his spirit quailed under sore temptations of the flesh! I have taught his doctrines among ye,—what I have done I have done,—but whether by inspiration of a god or of a fiend, I know not, and will now set at rest for ever and for ever. Your love supports me—my sinews shrink not—my spirit is resolved; and if my cause be heaven's, let heaven now give me a sign, and restore peace to my warring spirit, or prevent me from leading mankind astray to the flames of hell, mistaking them for the distant light of paradise! Therefore, kindle the pile! I will pass through the flames, and the earth and my own heart shall believe in my mission; or let them devour me even to my ashes, that not a taint of my existence may remain upon her breast! Tric-troc!—kindle the flames!”

“O, my master, my master! my light! my glory! I beseech thee have mercy upon thyself!” said Fra Biccoco, in an agony of grief; but it seemed as if the populace attached some extraordinary meaning to the unknown sounds uttered by the monk, and they unanimously murmured to one another, “Tric-troc!” in low, awe-struck, and inquiring tones.

“What wouldest thou have, faithful brother?” said Fra Bruno, with a momentary faltering in his tone. “What has life any longer for me? Dost thou grudge me the expiation which may redeem my soul? or deemest thou that it is better to rot in the dull earth than to mingle essences with the pure, rational, and sublime spirit of fire?”

“Let him pass through the ordeal, and I will believe—yea, give up the duke and his sorceress to your vengeance,” said Migueloto, with a strange mixture of doubt and mockery in his tones.

“It shall not be!—let us rescue him by force!” exclaimed Sir Reginald; but Fabio Orsino himself shared in the general delirium of superstition, and

baring his head, replied, "Nay, in God's name, let us abide the event."

The populace by their shouts and murmurs gave assent to this conclusion, and even the once gibing dwarf, Paschino, who was close to the pile, with an inarticulate murmur, for he had lost his tongue. Migueloto's guardsmen then hastily set fire to the faggots, while the Dominican knelt, and was for some moments engaged in rapt prayer, and the whole multitude looked on in silent and terrific expectation. The pile was soon in one vast pyramidal glow of flames and fiery smoke; Fra Bruno arose, embraced his faithful coadjutor, gave one steady look upwards to the sun, crossed himself and rushed into the flames. Those whose horror permitted them to continue gazing, beheld his dark and lofty form stand for an instant on the flaming summit of the pile, with its arms stretched upward:—an universal shout of triumph arose! But the next moment and he had sunk in the centre of the pile, into the raging furnace, which instantaneously enveloped him in its flames.

"Rescue! save the madman!" cried Le Beaufort, but no man echoed him, nor seconded him in the attempt which he made to tear down the fiery pile and rescue the unfortunate ordealist, when his attention was suddenly attracted by Bampton's cry of "Beware—treason!" and the old man darted before his lord just in time to receive in his own breast a pointed instrument which Migueloto had aimed at Le Beaufort, and which immediately opened like a fan with a dozen edges in the wound. Finding that his treacherous project had failed in its object, Migueloto echoed the cry of "Treason!" and shouted to his horsemen to return to Santangelo. But fast as he rode, Le Beaufort burst through the ranks of his men, and overtook him alone on the bridge of Santangelo. The castellan seemed in no humour to face his enraged follower, and his horse, affrighted with the rider's terror and spurred to madness, leaped the balustrade of the bridge, and rolled over and over with Migueloto down an abutment until both reached the river—a mingled mass of gore and bruises! Panic-struck, and pursued by Fabio and the Orsini, Migueloto's band rushed past without venturing to assail the victor, and were driven into Santangelo; but whether luckily or not for himself, the wounded castellan was rescued from the water by some fishermen, and consigned as a prisoner of the state to the dungeons of the Capitol, preserved with difficulty from the unabated fury of the Orsini, to obtain a confession of his master's crimes and projects.

Bampton died in the arms of his young lord, in a few hours after he had received his wound, without being able to utter a single articulate sound, excepting once, "Home, home!" which were the last sounds breathed from his lacerated lungs, adding in his death a bitter item to Le Beaufort's oath of vengeance.

Meanwhile the fanaticism of the people took a new turn, and convinced by his failure of their prophet's falsehood, they surrounded the furnace, and permitted no one to approach until the whole was reduced to ashes; and it is said that not even a bone remained in the heap to reward the pious search of Bieccocco, and some other devotees whose faith remained unshaken.

The Sacred College now laboured to restore some peace to the city, that it might proceed to the election of a new pontiff; but finding that while the armies of the different factions were in possession of Rome it was utterly impossible, in concurrence with the ambassadors of all the European powers, they determined on a measure of vigour. They de-

creed that Cæsar, the Orsini, and the Colonnas should leave the city with all their troops; and as the French army was already at Nepi, and the Spaniards on the frontiers of Naples, and both threatened to unite for the purpose of executing the order, none of the factions dared to disobey. Cæsar in vain alleged his infirm health; the Orsini and Colonnas refused to leave the city unless he was also compelled to quit it; and moreover he found himself rapidly deserted by his best soldiers, for Prospero Colonna published a command from the Kings of Spain, recalling all their subjects to their own standard in Naples.

A convention was made and sworn to by the chiefs of the factions, and by all with great reluctance, reserving to themselves the hope and the intention of revenge, but induced by the advantage of removing Cæsar from Rome, where his power might overawe the conclave into choosing a new pontiff in his interest. But though Fabio was compelled to retire to Bracciano, Le Beaufort still lingered with some vague expectation of an opportunity of vengeance arising—when to his astonishment and anger Cæsar himself demanded that he should have the care of the gate at which he was to leave the city, declaring that he would trust in no other. At first Le Beaufort utterly refused the request; but a thought occurred to him, and he complied at the reiterated entreaties of the council, with intent in some measure to give vent to the loathing and hatred which filled his soul.

Accordingly he witnessed the departure of the Borgia; and escorted by thirteen pieces of artillery, and the potent body of Italian soldiery who still remained true to him, Cæsar came—no longer as a chieftain and a warrior, but borne upon a litter by twelve of his halberdiers, who relieved each other at intervals, and closely curtained from observation. A war-horse was indeed led beside the couch by a page in a dark livery, who, when Sir Reginald demanded to speak with the duke, spurred in between them, and inquired his purpose with fierceness, at the same time plucking his hat over his brows, and raising an axe which he carried, as if he thought it possible to resist any intention against his master which the stalwart English knight might have formed. But finding that the retinue looked at the page as if awaiting his commands, Le Beaufort briefly replied by handing his gauntlet to the youth, and desiring him to inform his lord that he challenged him to mortal combat, as a disloyal traitor, murderer, and recreant.

“Keep it, keep thy gauntlet; it is in vain, he cannot answer thee,” returned the page, mournfully. “He but remembers at far intervals—the mighty mind is shattered even with its fabric, and no pillar remains to prop his falling fortunes!—Content you, knight, content you.”

But as he spoke Cæsar himself drew the curtain of his litter, and glaring full with mad defiance and ferocity at his enemy—“Fiamma, give it me!” he said, stretching his withered hand. “Give it me—and I *will* live, if it be but for vengeance on this slave that hath destroyed an empire!”

Le Beaufort was so struck with the horrible spectacle which his enemy now presented, his fine visage bloated out of all comeliness, his whole body covered with black sores, that he made no reply, and stood motionless at the gate until the procession had vanished out of sight.

Thus balked of his revenge, hopeless, and still consumed by a vain passion, but unable to prevail upon himself to return to his native land and fulfil his contract with his cousin, the Lady Alice, in an hour of utter despondency the remembrance of his parting words to Lucrezia struck Sir

Reginald so forcibly, that in spite of every remonstrance of reason and his family he sent back the remnant of his archers to England, with a resignation of his pretensions to the lady's hand, and an announcement of his determination to enter into the order of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John. With this determination he left Rome, embarked for Rhodes, which was then the chief possession of the knights, and enrolled himself to serve his novitiate.

After a lapse of time, however, disgusted by the dissolution which reigned in the order, and moved by the entreaties of his aged parents, Le Beaufort changed his resolve. But he was finally determined by an event which renewed his longing to revenge his own wrongs and the death of his unfortunate friend, Paolo Orsino.

The declension of Cæsar's fortunes was as rapid as their rise, principally owing to a decay of mind, which continued after the corporeal effects of the poison were over, and rendered him a victim of the arts which he had himself so long practised. The wrath of his enemies was for awhile appeased by beholding him gradually stripped of all his power and possessions, until finally the treachery of the Spaniards completed his ruin, who rid Italy of his presence by sending him in captivity into their own country. There he was imprisoned for two years in the Castle of Medina del Campo; but the exertions of a faithful page who shared his captivity, and who procured him a rope, by which he lowered himself from the tower in which he was imprisoned, and had horses in readiness for his flight below, enabled him to make his escape into Navarre, where the king, his brother-in-law, received him with open arms. In the wars in which this prince was engaged with his vassals, Cæsar began to revive his ancient reputation for military valour and success; and it was these tidings which determined Le Beaufort to relinquish his intention of remaining in the order of the Knights of St. John, at Rhodes.

Animated by an unceasing desire for vengeance, he journeyed through France to Navarre, and arrived at the city of Vienne, which was besieged by the King of Navarre and Cæsar Borgia, where he entered the service of its prince as a volunteer. The arrival of the renowned knight of England infused such courage into the besieged, who were scarcely inferior in number to their assailants, that it was determined to try the fortune of a sally. A general battle was the result, in which the Viennese were routed; and Cæsar, urging on the pursuit with great impetuosity, suddenly found his path crossed by a knight in the detested and ominous weeds of St. John.

Sir Reginald shouted aloud, "Cæsar Borgia, I am come to redeem my gauntlet!" and pausing for a moment until he thought that his enemy had time to prepare himself, he set his lance and drove full tilt at him. But Cæsar seemed suddenly struck with powerlessness; and though Le Beaufort could not cheek his own career, he felt that the Borgia's lance touched his breast as if scarcely held, while his own shivered the armour of his antagonist, and entered as deep as the head, and tearing away, left a large wound from which the blood rushed in a torrent. And yet Cæsar sat his steed for an instant of desperate endurance, and then fell backward from the saddle into the arms of a page, who had closely followed his lord's advance, sprang from his horse when the encounter took place, and arrived only in time to receive him falling. The weight of the duke and his armour crushed down the faithful attendant with himself, and Sir Reginald dismounted to render assistance. When he arrived at his fallen antagonist, the page had removed his helmet, and he had raised himself

on his elbow, continuing to glare fixedly at him, while the page distractedly endeavoured to stanch the gore which flowed from his large wound.

“Peace, peace, Fiamma—it is in vain! See you, he has come for me!” said Cæsar, in a low, horror-stricken tone. “It is Francesco!”

“Traitor! I am Reginald le Beaufort, who have repaid thee thus for all thy felonies, grieved only that thou diest not a felon’s death,” said Le Beaufort.

“Sir Reginald le Beaufort!—Nay, then, if thou art human—if thou art he!—Fiamma, give me way!” and dashing aside the hand with which she pressed a scarf to his wound, Cæsar sprang, as it seemed by a supernatural effort, upright on his feet to encounter his foe, and almost simultaneously fell dead beside the kneeling Colonna. The shriek with which she beheld the bleeding carcass whiten as she endeavoured again to raise the head, rang through Le Beaufort’s memory in many an after year!

“But the approach of a party of Navarrese horsemen compelled the English knight to look to his own safety, and to retire into the walls of Vienne, leaving the page stretched senseless on the breast of her too-well loved and ferocious lord.

We find it on record, that by the cares of a faithful attendant, who watched over the body of Cæsar until assistance came, it was conveyed to Pamplona, and buried with honours suitable to illustrious rank; and men were somewhat moved to consider the operations of divine justice, and the marvellous turns of fate, when they beheld all that remained of that ambitious and high-soaring existence buried as a mangled and vanquished soldier in the cathedral of which, in his youth, he had been a peaceful archbishop—if such a nature had ever in reality known peace.

Of the fate of that most faithful and most fortuneless paramour, who alone had remained true to him in every vicissitude, little is known with certainty, unless the conjecture of our chronicler is well founded, that she was identical with a pilgrim who visited nearly all the celebrated shrines of Europe, to offer prayer, and cause unnumbered masses to be said for the redemption of the soul of Cæsar Borgia, Duke of Romagna; and who died at Joppa, of the plague, on her way to visit the Holy Sepulchre with a similar intent.

Concerning the farther fortunes of Sir Reginald le Beaufort, the most diligent researches furnish us only with a few meagre facts. Undoubtedly he was the “potent and noble English knight, Sire Reginaldus,” who negotiated the peace between the King of Navarre and his vassal, the Prince of Vienne. We also know with certainty, at least with genealogical certainty, that the founder of the Le Beaufort family married his cousin, the Lady Alicea de Beaufort, in the year which closed the career of Cæsar Borgia, and that he had three sons and one daughter, called Lucretia; and that, at a subsequent period, he so zealously aided Henry VIII, in his Reformation labours, that not the least portion of the Le Beaufort estates at the present day consists in the three abbeys which his ancestor acquired as a reward for his services in restoring the church to her apostolic poverty.

Of the minor personages of the chronicle, it is known that Cæsar's general, Don Migueloto, was for many years imprisoned in Santangelo, and several times subjected to the torture, to make him discover where the riches of his lord and the plunder of the Vatican were concealed. It is said that he persevered to the last in refusing to divulge this secret; and although the manner of his death is not clearly known, there are not wanting obscure reports that he perished with a soldier whom he had corrupted, endeavouring to find his way to the subterraneous vault where the sorceress, Fiamma Colonna, had deposited the treasures of the Borgias, and where they still await a finder.

THE END.





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